

commentary

from other pens...

Iraqi defector seeks changes in homeland

By George Gedda Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Najib al-Salhi is not prone to ambiguities when he talks about Saddam Hussein. “Saddam is crazy,” the former Iraqi Army general said the other day as he discussed his 23-year quest to depose the Iraqi president.

For 17 of those years he did so clandestinely, from within the military inside Iraq. For the past five years he has operated from the outside, first in Jordan, now in a Virginia suburb of Washington.

During the interview, al-Salhi spoke matter-of-factly about mass graves outside Baghdad where he said remains of Saddam’s suspected opponents lie. He also recalled the poison gas used against an Iraqi Kurdish village in 1988; the tanks that he said were sent in to crush remains of those killed as anti-Saddam uprisings were suppressed.

Beyond that, he said, Saddam terrorizes military officers into obedience by having agents kidnap and rape relatives, then sending videotapes of the attacks back to the officers. Torture of officers’ fathers and mothers is not unusual, he says.

Al-Salhi, 49, has no doubt his own family in Iraq has been subjected to such treatment.

“I try not to think about it,” he said, speaking through an interpreter. “I don’t want to create obstacles to my work. We have to make sacrifices to get to our goals.”

Al-Salhi, who held the rank of staff general before deserting and who boasts a string of degrees, is founder and general secretary of the Movement of Free Officers, which he said maintains clandestine contacts with dissident officers inside Iraq.

The goal is to bring political change in Iraq and explore possibilities for a coup d’etat. The group publishes articles in anti-Saddam journals outside Iraq and keeps in touch with a range of Iraqi dissident groups.

A book al-Salhi wrote about Saddam’s repression of Shiites in southern Iraq was translated to English by the State Department. He contended the death toll from that campaign is in the 250,000 range.

To the delight of al-Salhi and his allies, the constituency in the United States for taking action against Iraq appears to be stronger now than at any time since the end of the Gulf War more than 10 years ago.

It has been stimulated in large measure by the success of U.S. forces in blasting the Taliban regime in Afghanistan out of power.

Referring to Iraq, President Bush said recently that countries that develop weapons of mass destruction intended for terrorist purposes “will be held accountable.”

A bipartisan group of leading members of Congress urged Bush two weeks ago to take decisive action against Iraq because the threat from that country “cannot be permanently contained.”

Skeptics warn the Afghanistan model cannot be duplicated easily in Iraq. They point out there is no equivalent in Iraq to Afghanistan’s northern alliance, a vital element in the defeat of the Taliban.

The Iraqi military is much larger and better equipped than the Taliban militia. Beyond that, if the United States takes on Iraq, it would not have nearly the international support it has enjoyed in the Afghan campaign.

Retired Marine Corps Gen. Anthony Zinni, former commander of the U.S. Central Command and now a Middle East envoy, is another skeptic. He wrote shortly before his retirement last year that the \$97 million in military support that Congress has appropriated for use by Iraqi rebels won’t get the job done.

“What will we have?” he asked. “A Bay of Goats, most likely.” Al-Salhi said the naysayers fail to consider the vulnerability of the Iraqi regime after decades of unabated repression.

“My work is to convince U.S. officials we have to get this job done,” he said. “The Iraqi people are waiting for U.S. efforts to get rid of Saddam.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.



Soup supper starts special college fund

It was the soup supper that wouldn’t die, but I really loved every minute of it.

It was all my idea, so it was only fair that I got to take of it.

As president of the Oberlin Rotary Club this year, I knew we needed to make some money for a pet project — our scholarship fund.

Last year, the club took on a foreign exchange student. Patricia was not just some middle class child from South America. She lived in an orphanage in Panama because her mother could not care for her or her brothers and sisters.

The club paid not only her education, but all of her miscellaneous expenses, including health care, while she spent her junior year at Decatur Community High. Patricia thrived and worked to learn English and absorb the American culture. Then she returned to Panama and her orphanage. Rotarians in Panama are paying to see that she spends her senior year in an English-speaking school.

Now the Oberlin club is raising money so she can attend college. We have a very real investment here, and we want to see this bright young woman have a chance to break free and become whatever she wants to be.

We set up a scholarship fund. It has had \$50 in it for four months. More was needed. A fund raiser was the ticket.

With the Christmas season, I suggested a soup supper downtown, and Saturday, Dec. 15, was agreed upon.



cynthia haynes

• open season

Everyone pitched in. Bowls, utensils and cups started to arrive at the newspaper office. Rotarians and their spouses made soup, sandwiches, pies and cakes. Tea, coffee, ice and condiments were provided. Steve and I made chili. Others made soup. We were set.

Friday afternoon, cakes and pies started to show up from Rotarians who would be gone for the weekend. I banished the office cat. His help was definitely not needed for this project — just imagine cakes with little kitty prints all over them.

On Saturday morning, I picked up three pies from a Rotarian. His wife told me she had been signed up and loved to bake but had to be out of town, so had turned the job over to the town’s master pie baker.

One Rotarian announced that his sandwiches were man-made — his wife was gone.

By 4:30 p.m., the workers arrived. We set up a sign in the street, plugged in all the crockpots of soup, set out the sandwiches and cut the pies and cakes.

“Please Lord,” I prayed, “Let there be someone

show up.”

Over the next couple of hours, we had 50 to 60 people sample our wares, not a great crowd, but not bad.

By 7 p.m. we were done, but we had leftovers. The unopened crackers and serving items were bagged for donation to the food pantry.

I ladled the leftover soup into disposable containers and piled the sandwiches and leftover cakes and pies in the truck.

We swept the floor, cleaned the tables and locked the door. We had made \$284.25.

I gave the partly eaten cakes to a friend with lots of children and took the rest of the stuff home.

Sunday morning, I headed for church with a truckload of sandwiches, cakes and soup. I sold about \$12 worth at the Catholic church after Mass and headed for the Methodist church. Another \$15 in kitty and we had made more than \$300 from our soup supper and traveling bake sale.

On Monday, the last of the items — three cakes, a pie, a dozen sandwiches and eight bowls of soup — went to the newspaper office. The society desk turned into a mini bake sale as the rest of the items were purchased by staff and visitors.

I enjoyed the whole experience and appreciate all the help from my Rotarians. But when that last sandwich went out the front door, boy, was I happy.

We now have a little over \$350 in the scholarship fund. That’s still a little short of a college education. Maybe a bake sale?

Unity falls short in changing people after attacks

To the Editor:

I have heard lately how America has changed since the Sept. 11 attacks. Well, maybe for New Yorkers and those who lost loved ones, but the rest of the country, for the most part, life goes on. After all, America is made up of mere people.

People still drive like they are the only ones on the road. We still pollute the land, water and air. We still don’t get the big picture.

Just in the first few days of this month, I have seen four people run stop signs. I have had three drivers pull out in front of me as if nobody else but them was on the road. I know two of them saw me. One, I don’t think she even looked, as she backed out onto 12th Street from where people park in that alcove area, next to West Elementary. As I was about to go around her, thinking she saw me, she proceeded to pull out, and I honked. That is when I realized she hadn’t even looked. Her car, with its blacked-out windows, let me see just enough through the windshield to see the surprised looked



from our readers

• to the editor

on her face. She never dropped her cell phone, though.

A couple of weeks ago, I saw a young girl, a seventh or eighth grader, walking east on 12th right after school. She had a can of pop in her hand. She tipped back her head, pulled up the can to her mouth, and downed the last of the pop. Without a moments hesitation, her hand came down and threw the empty can into the gutter. I see small examples of littering daily, but this was blatant pollution.

This is not just a Goodland problem; this is a national problem. Too many people don’t teach their children that polluting the land is wrong. How

where to write

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can we teach our children polluting is wrong, when so many of us do it also?

I think it is sad, very sad, as I have heard that some religious fundamentalists believe it is a sin to recycle. How can it possibly be a sin to keep the Creator’s creation clean? We use and abuse the land as if it were actually ours. I’ve got news for you, it isn’t. God gave us the land to use but Jesus never said it is OK to abuse it. Unfortunately, abuse, for some, is a way of life.

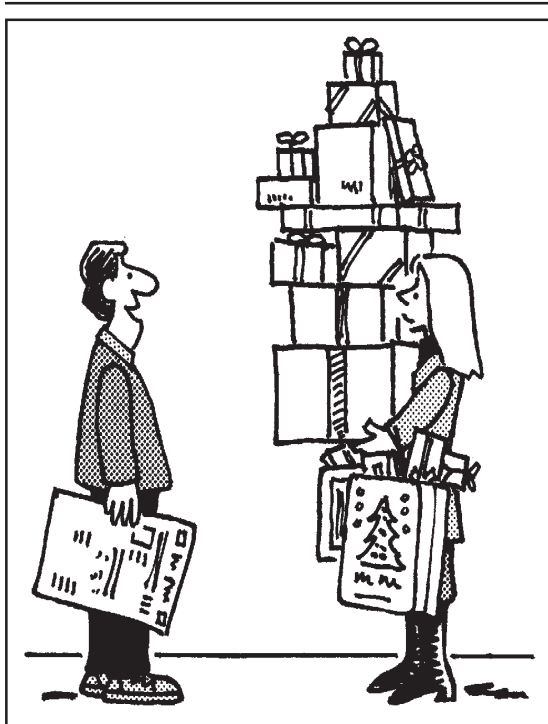
I won’t deny I was hurt by seeing that child throw the can in the gutter, but not surprised. All we have to do is look around at all the litter in the gutters and in the middle of the street daily to realize (whether you are white, black, latino, or any other nationality) nothing has really changed for most of us. Yes, there are a lot more flags hanging in windows or yards these days, but deep inside the recesses of our hearts, we haven’t changed a bit.

Change means doing something different. Making life better for ourselves, and others.

That also means looking deep inside ourselves to bring about that change. Therein lies the one thing more people are more frightened of than going to war.


Ronald Asbury
Goodland

berry’s world



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