



A surge of good news from Iraq

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The news from Iraq has been so encouraging in recent months that last week even the mainstream media finally sat up and took notice. Can the Democratic Party be far behind?

In a story titled "[Baghdad Comes Alive](#)," Rod Nordland reports in the current Newsweek on the heartening transformation underway in the Iraqi capital:

"Returning to Baghdad after an absence of four months," he writes, "I can actually say that things do seem to have gotten better, and in ways that may even be durable . . . There hasn't been a successful suicide car bombing in Baghdad in five weeks . . . Al Qaeda in Iraq is starting to look like a spent force, especially in Baghdad."

The signs of life, Nordland acknowledges "grudgingly" - his word - are undeniable.

"Emerging from our bunkers into the Red Zone, I see the results everywhere. Throughout Baghdad, shops and street markets are open late again, taking advantage of the fine November weather. Parks are crowded with strollers, and kids play soccer on the streets. Traffic has resumed its customary epic snarl. The Baghdad Zoo is open, and caretakers have even managed to bring in two lionesses to replace the menagerie that escaped in the early days of the war. . . . The Shorja bazaar in old Baghdad, hit by at least six different [car bombs](#) killing hundreds in the last year, is again crowded with people among the narrow tented stalls. On nearby Al-Rasheed Street, the famous booksellers are

back in business. . . . People are buying alcohol again -- as they always had in Baghdad, until religious extremists forced many neighborhood liquor shops to close."

Newsweek's isn't the only big media voice bringing tidings of comfort and joy from the Iraqi theatre.

On Tuesday, The New York Times led its front page with a good-news headline - "[Baghdad Starts to Exhale as Security Improves](#)" - and a large photo of an [Iraqi bride and groom](#), bedecked in wedding finery and accompanied by a band. Below that: a picture of smiling diners at Al Farris, a restaurant on the Tigris riverbank that is booming once again. Inside, across four columns, another photo showed an outdoor foosball game in Baghdad's Haifa Street, once dubbed the "Street of Fear" because it was the scene of so many lethal sectarian attacks.

In [another Page 1 story](#) the day before ("U.S. Says Attacks in Iraq Fell to the Level of Early Last Year"), the Times recounted some of the auspicious data: civilian fatalities down 75 percent in recent months, Iraqi security-force casualties down 40 percent, total weekly attacks nationwide down nearly two-thirds since June. The Los Angeles Times, too, fronted a story on the promising developments, describing last Monday an "unexpected flowering of sectarian cooperation" in which "Sunnis and Shi'ites are joining hands at the local level to protect their communities from militants." The results, [the paper reported](#) from the rural community of Qarghulia

on Monday, "are palpable. Killings are down dramatically and public confidence is reviving."

Of course things could still change for the worse. In the Middle East there are always caveats -- and few guarantees. The Iraqi government is still largely paralyzed. Neither the US military nor the Bush administration plans to dust off that "Mission Accomplished" banner anytime soon.

Still: "By every metric used to measure the war," as The Washington Post noted in an [editorial](#) on Nov. 18, "there has been an enormous improvement since January." The Post credits this achievement to American soldiers in Iraq, to the military strategy devised by their commanding general, David Petraeus, "and to President Bush, for making the decision to launch the surge against the advice of most of Congress and the country's foreign policy elite."

With the media at last paying attention to the remarkable progress in Iraq, shouldn't leading Democrats think about doing the same? Perhaps this would be a good time for Hillary Clinton to express regret for telling Petraeus that his recent progress report on Iraq required "a willing suspension of disbelief" -- in effect, [calling him a liar](#). Perhaps Senate majority leader Harry Reid should admit that he may have been wrong when he [declared so emphatically](#): "This war is lost, and the surge is not accomplishing anything."

All of the Democratic presidential candidates have been running on a platform of abandoning Iraq. At the recent [debate in Las Vegas](#), they refused to relax their embrace of defeat even when asked about the striking evidence of improvement. They continued to insist that "the surge is not working" (Bill Richardson), that "the occupation is fueling the insurgency" (Dennis Kucinich), and that the "strategy is failed" and

we must "get our troops out" (Barack Obama).

Blind opposition to war that seems lost is understandable. But can Democrats be so invested in defeat that they would abandon even a war that may be winnable? With developments in Iraq looking so hopeful, this is no time to cling to a counsel of despair.