

Iraq: one year later

IT'S been a year since the Bush administration defied international law and public opinion and launched its invasion of Iraq. Since then, more than 10,000 Iraqis have died along with almost 600 American military personnel, 60 British troops and over 40 other coalition fighters. Approximately 10,000 American troops have also been injured along with countless Iraqis.

The Christian Science Monitor cites the Pentagon in reporting that US forces fired over 75 tons of radioactive "Depleted Uranium" (DU) munitions in Iraq during this war, with some spent rounds producing radiation at 1,300 times the normal background level. The paper admits that other sources estimate that up to 1,000 tons of radioactive dust and debris were spread over Iraq during the current war.

The United States, recipient of the world's sympathy and support in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, is now a global pariah, diplomatically isolated and almost universally despised by the overwhelming majority of the world's citizens. This is especially true in countries where the US needs friends in its struggle against terrorism.

A poll conducted by The Pew Research Center, for example, shows that 61% of Indonesian Muslims held favorable opinions of the United States in 2002. That number dropped to 15% after the Iraq Invasion. Equally upsetting is the fact that nearly three quarters of the population of NATO ally Turkey fear that the US may someday threaten their country. We're at our most popular in Britain, where only 57% of the population opposes Bush's policies. In essence, the rest of the world now sees us as a bunch of bullet-headed cowboys. And why shouldn't they?

The first anniversary of the war was marked this past weekend by over 575 anti-war demonstrations in 60 countries, including 300 demonstrations in the US. In a preview of what this summer's Republican convention will look like, almost 100,000 people marched in New York last Saturday, corralled like cattle into pens stretching almost 40 blocks. Another 50,000 marched under slightly more democratic conditions in San Francisco. In

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New Englander George W. Bush's adopted home town of Crawford, Texas, 1,000 folks came out to march against the policies of their millionaire carpetbagger neighbor.

Military mourners protest the war

The most interesting aspect of this past week's protests is the active involvement of Iraq War veterans, military families and relatives of service personnel killed in Iraq. By contrast, during the Vietnam War, it took nearly 10 years of bloodshed before these players developed an active voice in the peace movement. This time around, they began marching before the war hit its first birthday.

Last week, family members who lost loved ones to Bush's Iraq War marched on the Air Force base in Dover, Delaware, and at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C., in anti-war protests organized by Military Families Speak Out (www.mfso.org) and Veterans for Peace (www.veteransforpeace.org). One of these protestors, Sue Niederer, a mother who lost her son recently in Iraq, was quoted in The Toronto Star describing her son's death in Iraq as being "in vain." She went on to explain that if her actions helped bring other service personnel home, "then he died for a purpose." Another military mom, Jean Prewett, who lost her son, said that she never protested before and generally is pretty shy, but she began demonstrating because she wanted George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to know how families were suffering – especially, she explained, because her son died fighting in a war that was based on faulty intelligence data.

Speaking more to the point, one father, Fernando Suarez del Solar, told Agencie France Presse that "Bush lied" and his son "died." The mourners who participated in these demonstrations were berated by the pro-war Free Republic web site as being "dim-wits" and "idiots" who stay "focused" by "hating America." With anti-war feelings spreading across the American political landscape, the Bush team is finding its dwindling pockets of pro-war support in some pretty fetid places.

A Year of Lies Now Documented

The past year has seen all of the Bush administration's justifications for this war exposed as deliberate lies. This comes as no surprise to alternative press readers and listeners who, going into the war, heard or read countless testimonies from current and former US military officials explaining that Iraq no longer had weapons of mass destruction or a program to produce such weapons, and was not harboring or supporting representatives from al Qaida, which the US intelligence community clearly identified as a foe of the secularist Iraqi regime.

Last week the US House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform

released a 34 page report documenting a deliberate disinformation campaign launched by the Bush administration in order to trick Congress into supporting the war. The report, which is available on the web (www.reform.house.gov/min), documented 237 misleading public statements about the "threat" posed by Iraq, made by "President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell and National Security Advisor Rice."

The report, in dry social scientific deadpan style, divided the false statements into four categories. The first category consisted of statements falsely claiming that Iraq posed an "urgent threat" to the US. The other categories were statements falsely claiming Iraqi ties to al Qaida, threats about nonexistent nuclear activities and threats about defunct chemical and biological weapons programs. Punctuated with odd little charts showing "Number of Misleading Statements Made Each Month," (Sept. 2002 showed a huge spike) and "Categories of Misleading Statements" (the Bio/Chem weapons bar is the tallest), the report documented specific false statements along with when and where they were made.

The report cites Bush, for example, on November 7th, 2002, telling the nation that Saddam was "a threat because he is dealing with al Qaida" and that a network of terrorists "trained and armed by Saddam could attack America." In his 2003 lie-laced State of the Union Address, Bush proclaimed that "Evidence from intelligence sources, secret communications, and statements by people now in custody reveal that Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of al Qaeda [spelling as in original documents]." Of course, as US intelligence officials have since explained, there was no such evidence. This misrepresentation of an Iraqi link to al Qaida was the most common misstatement made by Bush leading up to the war.

Our compliant wartime press

Under normal conditions, such a report would be an historic document, to be followed up with impeachment hearings. Lying to the congress is a crime – especially when telling those lies results in a war. But these aren't normal times for America. So the release of this report was eclipsed by more important events, such as the NCAA basketball playoffs and ongoing chatter about Martha Stewart's conviction for lying about conversations with her stockbroker. Stewart, of course, is held to a higher standard than George W. Bush.

Of course it's no surprise that the corporate media would downplay the historic significance of this report. It was the same corporate media that allowed Bush's false statements to fly unchallenged in their pages and on their airwaves in the lead-up to the

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war – at a time when the alternative media were using statements from current and retired US government officials to debunk the Bush misstatements.

The Los Angeles Times' Robert Sheer told an audience at the University of California at Berkeley School of Journalism's War and the Media conference, that timid journalists feared being labeled "unpatriotic" if they challenged statements from "a punitive government." Challenging official statements, especially those issued by a punitive government, however, is the responsibility of a free press in a democratic society. Anything less is unacceptable. The failure of the press to challenge blatant lies and disinformation was ultimately responsible for the ensuing war – built on a foundation of misinformation trumpeted by a compliant press corps. Media kills.