

Mr Tall and Mr Small

By Greg Palast
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Our President told the debate audience, “You cannot lead if you send messed missiges.” I certainly hope not.

But that’s exactly what we got. You watch our President, the nervous hand-hiding, the compulsive water-glass-fondling, the panicked I-wish-I-had-a-whiskey look, and you think, “My god, this is the guy who’s supposed to save us from al Qaeda.”

And how are we going to win the War on Terror, Mr. President? “First of all, of course I know Osama bin Laden attacked us. I know that,” he said. Well, that’s a start, I suppose.

But it doesn’t have to stay this way. This is America, home of the brave and where, I remember from school, we could vote for president and the votes would count. So we looked to the tall man next to him to show us the way out.

In Iraq, “We don’t have enough troops there,” said the tall one. Really, Senator? We should send MORE? Not exactly: Mr. Tall’s got a plan to get our troops out. He’ll have a big meeting of “allies,” and after he talks with them, they will all jump up and volunteer to send THEIR kids to Fallujah. France and Indonesia and Kuwait can’t wait to ship in soldiers and extra body bags. Right. We love you, John, but there’s no band of Hobbits coming to the rescue – that’s just a movie.

Well, he looked kind of “presidential.” But given the line-up includes Nixon, Ford and two Bushes, that’s not a big trick.

I’m sorry. I know I’m supposed to stand up and cheer that John Kerry didn’t get Gored. In fact, if you look at presidential debates the way the media plays it, as something akin to Olympic figure skating, where you score for the competitor’s style, you could say Kerry won.

But I don’t feel WE won anything.

I mean, when Jim Lehrer asked how the candidates would make America safe from terrorists, Mr. Tall said he’d hire more firemen. And add more cops. Maybe he thought he was running for mayor.

It was disappointing, but then Mr. Small’s answer was downright frightening. We have to “stay on the offensive,” and “stay on the offense,” and “I repeat, stay on the offense.” We have no doubt that Mr. Small can be extraordinarily offensive, but even he can’t take his

Mr Tall and Mr Small / 2

offensiveness to the bad guys if he doesn't know where they are. And on that point, he's clueless.

There were two words I was hoping to hear from Mr. Tall: "Saudi" and "Arabia." Imagine if he laid it on the line, "The terrorists didn't put the hijackings on a credit card, Mr. President. Their Saudi sponsors are fattening on the bloated war-driven price of oil. But you can't touch your buck-buddies in the Gulf, can you, Mr. President? As Commander-in-Chief, I'd cut'm off at the spigots, beginning with the release of oil from our Strategic Petroleum Reserve. And then I'd seize their fat assets in the USA to compensate the victims of terror attacks."

When Mr. Tall was asked what whoppers the President has told us, surely there was something a bit more memorable than Mr. Small's failing to win over allies for his whacky crusade.

Here's what Mr. Tall said . . . in my dreams:

* "Beginning in March 2001, your Administration began a series of meetings with oil company executives to map the conquest of Iraq and its oil, a plan Americans would pay for in blood. You originally called this scheme, 'Operation Iraqi Liberation' – O.I.L. We don't appreciate your little joke, Mr. Small."

* "One month after seizing Baghdad you fired General Jay Garner, the man you put in charge of Iraq, after he called for rapid elections in Najaf; after he refused to impose your plans to sell off Iraq's oil fields. In Najaf, citizens denied ballots, turned to bullets. And then, as General Garner predicted, the seizure of Iraq's assets resulted in the type of war one expects – when seeking to impose colonial control."

* "Mr. Small, you claim we've given a thousand lives to bring democracy to the Mid-east. But so far, your democracy, Mr. Small, comes down to a puppet prime minister, we've installed in Iraq and a puppet government, the Saudis have installed in Washington."

OK, I can't expect all that in a presidential debate, where the message has to fit through a tube. But still, Mr. Tall could have won my vote with two words. It's the two-word answer John Kerry gave three decades ago when asked the same question – "How can we get our troops out of a disastrous war?"

Then, the clear-minded, tall young men said, "In ships."