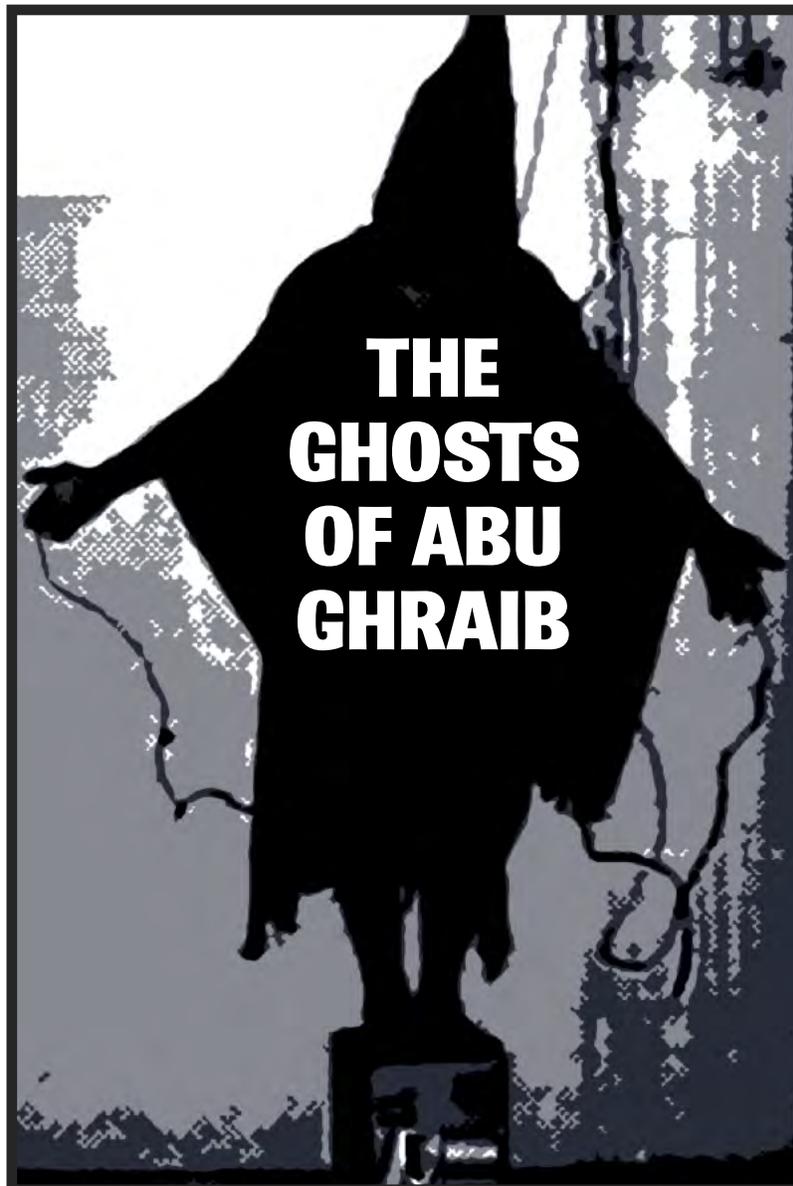
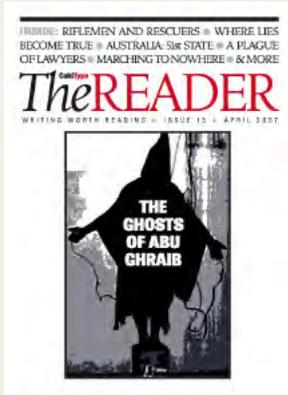

INSIDE: RIFLEMEN AND RESCUERS ● WHERE LIES BECOME TRUE ● AUSTRALIA: 51st STATE ● A PLAGUE OF LAWYERS ● MARCHING TO NOWHERE ● & MORE

ColdType
The **READER**

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 13 ● APRIL 2007



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Editor:
Tony Sutton
editor@coldtype.net

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THE GHOSTS OF ABU GHRAIB

BY SAM PROVANCE

Former Army Sgt. Sam Provance was a hero of the Abu Ghraib scandal, the only uniformed military intelligence officer at the Iraqi prison to testify about abuses during the internal Army investigation. When he recognized that the Pentagon was scapegoating low-level personnel, he also gave an interview to ABC News. For refusing to play along with the cover-up, Provance was punished and pushed out of the U.S. military. The Pentagon went forward with its plan to pin the blame for the sadistic treatment of Iraqi detainees on a handful of poorly trained MPs, not on the higher-ups who brought the lessons of “alternative interrogation techniques” from the Guantanamo Bay prison to Abu Ghraib. The Congress, then controlled by the Republicans, promised a fuller investigation. Provance submitted a sworn statement. But Congress never followed through, leaving Provance hanging out to dry. Then, in February 2007, he went to a special screening of the documentary, “Ghosts of Abu Ghraib,” and learned more than he expected about why the scandal died

For those of you who have not heard of me, I am Sam Provance. My career as an Army sergeant came to a premature end at age 32 after eight years of decorated service, because I refused to remain silent about Abu Ghraib, where I served for five months in 2004 at the height of the abuses.

A noncommissioned officer specializing in intelligence analysis, my job at Abu Ghraib was systems administrator (“the computer guy”). But I had the misfortune of being on the night shift, saw detainees dragged in for interrogation, heard the screams, and saw many of them dragged out. I was sent back to my parent unit in Germany shortly after the Army began the first of its many self-investigations.

In Germany, I had the surreal experience of being interrogated by one of the Army-General-Grand-Inquisitors, Major General George Fay, who showed himself singularly uninterested in what went on at Abu Ghraib.

I had to insist that he listen to my eyewitness account, whereupon he

I had the misfortune of being on the night shift, saw detainees dragged in for interrogation, heard the screams, and saw many of them dragged out

WITNESS TO TORTURE

I made it through the next two and a half years of professional limbo, applying my computer skills to picking up trash and performing guard duty

threatened punitive actions against me for not coming forward sooner and even tried to hold me personally responsible for the scandal itself.

The Army then demoted me, suspended my Top Secret clearance, and threatened me with ten years in a military prison if I asked for a court martial. I was even given a gag order, the only one I know to have been issued to those whom Gen. Fay interviewed.

But the fact that most Americans know nothing of what I saw at Abu Ghraib, and that my career became collateral damage, so to speak, has nothing to do with the gag order, which turned out to be the straw that broke this sergeant's back.

After seeing first-hand that the investigation wasn't going to go anywhere and that no one else I knew from the intelligence community was being candid, I allowed myself to be interviewed by American and German journalists. Sadly, you would have had to know German to learn the details of what I had to say at that time about the abuses at Abu Ghraib.

Later, Republican Congressman Christopher Shays, who was then chair of the House Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, invited me to testify on Feb. 14, 2006, so my sworn testimony is on the public record. [See: www.humanrightsfirst.info/pdf/06214-usls-provance-statement.pdf]

On June 30, 2006, dissatisfied with the Pentagon's non-responsiveness to requests for information on my situation, the Committee on Government Reform issued a subpoena requiring

then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to produce the requested documents by July 14. I heard nothing further. I guess he forgot. I guess Congress forgot, too.

Thanks largely to a keen sense of justice and a good dose of courage on the part of pro bono lawyers and congressional aides, I made it through the next two and a half years of professional limbo, applying my computer skills to picking up trash and performing guard duty. Instead of a prison sentence, I was honorably discharged on Oct. 13, 2006 and began my still-continuing search for a place back in the civilian world.

Producers for Rory Kennedy's documentary *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* were among the journalists who interviewed me – discreetly – in Germany. On Feb. 12, 2007 I attended a screening of that documentary. What happened there bears telling.

Surreal Event

Walking into the fancy government building to see the documentary proved to be a bizarre experience. Hardly in the door, I saw a one of the guests shaking his head, saying in some wonderment, "The young woman at the front desk greeted me with a cheerful smile; Abu Ghraib? she said. Right this way, please."

The atmosphere did seem more appropriate for an art show than a documentary on torture. People were dressed to the nines, heartily laughing, and servers with white gloves were walking about with wine and hors d'oeuvres.

I managed to find one other person

who was also in the film, former Gen. Janis Karpinski, with whom I shared the distinction of having been reduced in rank because we refused to “go along to get along.”

I had wanted to talk to her ever since the abuses at Abu Ghraib came to light. We’ve been on the same page from the beginning. She seemed happy to meet me as well, but so many others wanted her attention that serious conversation was difficult.

Everyone shuffled into the theater and Gen. Karpinski’s and my presence there was announced briefly during the introductions. I was pleasantly surprised to hear that the showing was to be followed by a discussion led by Sen. Edward Kennedy (who was there from the start) and Sen. Lindsey Graham (who arrived only after the introductions).

It was largely because of the interest that Sen. Kennedy took in the Army’s retaliation against me that I escaped the Army’s full wrath for truth telling. And Sen. Graham initially had approached me when he heard of my situation, not even realizing at the time that I was from South Carolina. So I was looking forward to what I expected would be an unusual bipartisan challenge to the practice of torture.

Flashback

When the lights dimmed and the documentary started, I began to be affected more emotionally than I had expected.

It was the words of the other soldiers that touched me most deeply, because I could relate to them; I knew those soldiers on one level or another. I got

worried I might not make it through the screening, that I would break down right there.

Ironically, it was my anger at their plight that kept me composed. Everything in the film was all too familiar to me. The soldiers explaining they were just following the orders of their supervisors; the higher-ups vigorously shifting blame from themselves onto soldiers of lesser rank – the whole nine yards.

And to see those Iraqi faces again – the broken hearts and ruined lives of innocent Iraqi citizens detained, abused, tortured. And the systematic cover-up, with the Army investigating itself over and over again, giving the appearance of a “thorough” investigation.

After the film, Senators Kennedy and Graham took seats on the stage to begin their discussion. I was shocked to see it descend into heated debate.

Sen. Graham began saying things that I couldn’t believe I was hearing. He made a complete 180-degree turn on the issue of torture from when I had spoken to him on the phone not long after the Abu Ghraib scandal was exposed.

Now he was portraying Abu Ghraib as a place where only a handful of soldiers resided (you’ve heard of them, the so-called “rotten apples.”) I felt betrayed.

Worse still, the only officer Graham saw fit to criticize (he assumed in absentia) was Gen. Karpinski. And he laid it on thick, asserting forcefully that she should have been court-martialed because she was the reason things went awry.

Sen. Graham began saying things that I couldn’t believe I was hearing. He made a complete 180-degree turn on the issue of torture from when I had spoken to him on the phone not long after the Abu Ghraib scandal was exposed

WITNESS TO TORTURE

He dropped a bombshell when he began defending the practice of torture itself, using the torture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed as an example

The senator argued that Karpinski (who was responsible for overseeing 17 prisons with military police, most of whom had not been trained in detention operations) should have driven from her headquarters to Abu Ghraib for random middle-of-the-night checks. He then saw fit to contrast her behavior with what Graham described the due diligence he exercised nightly as an Army lawyer in checking the “dormitory.” (sic)

Anyone who knows much about Abu Ghraib knows that all kinds of Army brass lived and worked there, and that it was host to visits by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, U.S. pro-consul Paul Bremer, Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, Gen. Geoffrey Miller (in charge of “Gitmo-izing Abu Ghraib), Gen. Barbara Fast, and even National Security Council functionary Frances Townsend.

They were all there. I don’t know how many, if any, saw fit to check the “dormitory.”

Torture works?

During the discussion/debate, Sen. Graham seemed to be speaking in support of virtually everything that we opposed – and that had been exposed in the documentary – throwing all reason out the window. He dropped a bombshell when he began defending the practice of torture itself, using the torture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed as an example. He cited the “good stuff” gleaned from treating him that way, as if to say, “it works!”

This raised again the question in my mind about just what kind of person

professionally tortures somebody, and what kind of mentality would approve of it? (I found myself almost wishing such people could hear the screams – almost, because I would not wish that on my worst enemy.)

The obvious answer is: Sadists. Which is what the administration called the military police in the infamous photographs. And what was seen in them was small stuff compared to what else happened – and continued to happen even after the abuses at Abu Ghraib were exposed.

Benjamin Thompson, a former U.S. Army specialist at Abu Ghraib, has told Reuters that exposure of the scandal “basically diverted everyone’s attention away from anything that was not in the photographs... as long as we didn’t stack people and make pyramids, we were doing a great job.”

This reminds me of my wonderment at President George W. Bush’s public advocacy last fall of the “alternative” interrogation procedures in what clearly is one of his favorite CIA programs. Perhaps better than others I can imagine what has been tucked under the rubric of “alternative” techniques, the alleged success of which the President has advertised and has been picked up in the captive corporate media.

At one point Sen. Graham asked the audience who among us considered Army specialist Joe Darby a hero. Darby was the one who initially gave the Abu Ghraib photos to Army investigators. Pausing a few seconds, Graham used the momentary silence as a cue to continue talking about how the American people really don’t care about torture.

For me, the worst part is that I have found this to be generally true. It is more convenient for people not to care. By and large, they are far more prepared to accept official explanations than to take the trouble to find out what is really going on. For, if they found out, their consciences might require them to do something about it.

Sen. Graham's demeanor was downright eerie in the way he chose to relate to the crowd... beaming with a kind of delight and mocking the outrage that he must have seen building.

This reminded me of my experience in Iraq, where I would hear soldiers discussing their abuse of detainees. It was always cast as a humorous thing, and each recounting won the expected – sometimes forced – laugh.

But now I am in Washington, I thought: Has everyone been bitten by the torture bug? I was sickened to watch a senior senator and lawyer flippantly dismiss what happened at Abu Ghraib, and act as though he knew more about the abuses than the people, like me, who were there.

Sadly, Graham is not the first elected official who has become part of the problem rather than the solution.

Audience unrest

Unrest was spreading in the audience to the point where some were threatened with ejection. People were yelling at Sen. Graham from all over the theater and for a moment I thought a riot might ensue.

But Sen. Kennedy's response pierced the darkness with the white-hot light of truth. Clearly, he was just as uncomfort-

able as most of the rest of us at what we had just witnessed, and he spoke in a straightforward way against what is just plain wrong.

For me, his comments came in the nick of time. I was beginning to feel not only betrayed, but a little crazy. Was this really happening? Later, I was happy to be able to shake Sen. Kennedy's hand as he left the theater.

At the end, producer Rory Kennedy brought a portable microphone to Gen. Karpinski where she sat in the audience and, directing her attention back to the stage, explained to Sen. Graham that Karpinski was present and that it seemed only fair to give her a chance to comment on his remarks about her.

She rose and, in quiet but no uncertain terms, accused Graham and the general officers involved in Abu Ghraib of "cowardice." Then she noted that as a South Carolinian she intended to work very hard to ensure that he would not be the senior senator beyond January 2009.

As to the merits of his charges against her, Gen. Karpinski revealed that she had actually pressed hard to be court-martialed and to appear before a jury of her peers, to get the whole truth up and out. She explained that the Army refused her request, presumably because a court martial might jeopardize the Pentagon's attempt to restrict blame to the "few bad apples."

Graham was initially taken somewhat aback, but he recovered quickly. He offered no apology. Rather, he attempted to trivialize what had just happened with the jovial remark, "Well, I guess I lost your vote!" Smirk. Smirk.

I was sickened to watch a senior senator and lawyer flippantly dismiss what happened at Abu Ghraib, and act as though he knew more about the abuses than the people, like me, who were there

WITNESS TO TORTURE

Now the dust had settled for a moment; it was encouraging to know the truth can still stand tall

Make that two votes.

Afterwards, it was back to high-society small talk and wine, while I looked for someone to really talk to. A reporter who has been covering the issue from the start sought me out and told me something that made me want to cry.

“You know we’ve talked over the years and I have followed your case, but I just want to tell you that I have found everything you’ve said to me all along to be true.”

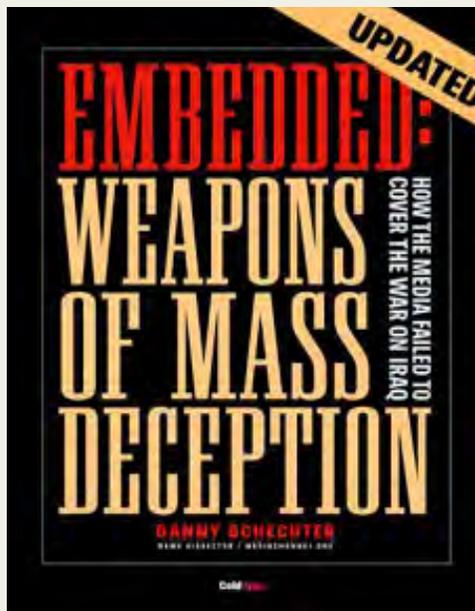
For so long people have tried so hard to discredit either me or my testimony. Now the dust had settled for a moment; it was encouraging to know the truth can still stand tall.

I ended up hanging out with Janis Karpinski and later walking her to the Metro station. I gave her a big hug and told her I’d always be her soldier. Then, as she went down the escalator I saluted her, and she returned my salute.

“Thank you,” she said. “Anytime, General!” I replied. “Anytime.” **CT**

Former Army Sgt. Sam Provance was a hero of the Abu Ghraib scandal, the only uniformed military intelligence officer at the Iraqi prison to testify about abuses during the internal Army investigation

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RIFLEMEN AND RESCUERS

BY REBECCA SOLNIT

On March 5, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama went south to compete for the limelight on the 42nd anniversary of “Bloody Sunday,” the day in March 1965 when Alabama law enforcement drove Civil Rights demonstrators off the Edmund Pettus Bridge and back into Selma. Somehow, the far larger and more desperate attempt of a largely African-American population to march across a bridge less than two years ago, during the days after Hurricane Katrina, and the even more vicious response, has never quite entered the mainstream imagination. Few outside New Orleans, therefore, understand that the city became a prison in the days after 80% of it was flooded (nor has it fully sunk in that the city was flooded not by a hurricane but by the failure of levees inadequately built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).

According to a little-noted Los Angeles Times report from that moment, “Authorities in St. Bernard Parish, to the east, stacked cars to seal roads from the Crescent City.” Not only were relief sup-

plies and rescuers kept out of the city, but many who could have rescued themselves or reached outside rescue efforts were forcibly kept in. The spectacle of the suffering and squalor of crowds trapped without food, water, or sanitation in sweltering heat that so transfixed the nation was not just the result of incompetence, but of malice. While the media often tended to portray the victims as largely criminals, government officials shifted the focus from rescue to the protection of property and the policing of the public. There’s no way to count how many died as a result of all this.

The Mississippi-straddling Crescent City Connection Bridge was closed to pedestrians by law enforcement from Gretna, the mostly white community across the river. They fired their guns over the heads of women and children seeking to flee the dire conditions of the Superdome and Convention Center, as well as the heat and thirst of the devastated city, driving back thousands attempting to escape their captivity in squalor. There have been no consequences from any of these acts, though

The spectacle of the suffering and squalor of crowds trapped without food, water, or sanitation in sweltering heat that so transfixed the nation was not just the result of incompetence, but of malice

AFTER KATRINA

Ex-Black Panther Malik Rahim says that he witnessed a race war beginning in Algiers (next to Gretna) where he lived and that it was defused by the young, white bicycle medics who came to minister to both communities

Congressional Representatives Cynthia McKinney and John Conyers have denounced them as hate crimes and called for investigations, and the Reverend Lennox Yearwood said, “Can you imagine during 9/11, the thousands who fled on foot to the Brooklyn Bridge, not because they wanted to go to Brooklyn, but because it was their only option? What if they had been met by six or eight police cars blocking the bridge, and cops fired warning shots to turn them back?”

During my trips to the still half-ruined city, some inhabitants have told me that they, in turn, were told by white vigilantes of widespread murders of black men in the chaos of the storm and flood. One local journalist assured me that he tried to investigate the story, but found it impossible to crack. Reporters, he said, were not allowed to inspect recovered bodies before they were disposed of. These accounts suggest that, someday, an intrepid investigative journalist may stand on its head the media hysteria of the time (later quietly recanted) about African-American violence and menace in flooded New Orleans. Certainly, the most brutal response to the catastrophe was on the part of institutional authority at almost every level down to the most local.

These stories are important, if only to understand what New Orleans is recovering from – not just physical devastation, but social fissures and racial wounds in a situation that started as a somewhat natural disaster and became a socially constructed catastrophe. Nothing quite like it has happened in American history. It’s important to note

as well that many racial divides were crossed that week and after – by people who found common cause inside the city – by, for instance, the “Cajun Navy” of white boat-owners who got into flooded areas to rescue scores of people.

Ex-Black Panther Malik Rahim says that he witnessed a race war beginning in Algiers (next to Gretna) where he lived and that it was defused by the young, white bicycle medics who came to minister to both communities; since then the organization Rahim co-founded, Common Ground Collective, has funneled more than 11,000 volunteers, mostly white, into New Orleans.

Parades and patrols

New Orleans may have always been full of contradictions, but post-Katrina they stand in high relief. For weeks in February, parades wound past rowdy crowds in the uptown area as part of the long carnival season that leads up to Mardi Gras. Since June, camouflage-clad, heavily armed National Guardsmen have been patrolling other parts of the flood-ravaged city in military vehicles, making the place feel as much like a war zone as a disaster zone – and perhaps it is. (On March 8, for instance, a Guardsman repeatedly shot in the chest a 53-year-old African-American with mental problems. He had brandished a BB gun at a patrol near his home, in which he had ridden out Katrina, in the Upper Ninth Ward.) New Orleans’ poverty was, and is, constantly referenced in the national media; and the city did, and does, have a lot of people without a lot of money, resources, health care, education, and opportunity. But its people are peculiarly

rich in networks, roots, traditions, music, festive ritual, public life, and love of place, an anomaly in an America where, generations ago, most of us lost what the depleted population of New Orleans is trying to reclaim and rebuild.

I've long been interested in ruins, in cities and civil society in the wake of disaster, and so I've been to New Orleans twice since Katrina hit and I've tried to follow its post-catastrophe course from afar the rest of the time. On this carnival-season visit, even my own response was contrary: I wanted to move there and yet was appalled, even horrified, by tales of institutional violence that people passed on to me as the unremarkable lore of everyday life.

If New Orleans is coming back, it's because a lot of its citizens love it passionately, from the affluent uptowners who formed Women of the Storm to massage funding channels to the radical groups such as the People's Hurricane Relief Fund dealing with the most devastated zones. Nationally, there have been many stories about people giving up and leaving again because the reopened schools are still lousy and crime is soaring; the way people are trickling back in has been far less covered.

Of a pre-storm white population of 124,000 more than 80,000 were back by last fall, while about the same number of African-Americans had returned – from a pre-storm population of 300,000. Though some have chosen not to return, many are simply unable to, or are still organizing the means to do so. Other roadblocks include the shuttering of all the housing projects in the city, including some that sustained little or no damage

in the floods. A few have been occupied by former residents demanding the right of return. It's little noted that not all those who are still in exile from the city are there by choice. And while, once again, the mainstream media story of exile has been grim – that evacuees from New Orleans have brought a crime wave to Texas, for instance – one longtime Austin resident assures me that they've also brought a lot of music, public life, and good food.

I visited New Orleans 11 months ago, during Easter Week 2006, and it was then a ghost town, spookily unpopulated, with few children among the returnees; 10 months later, after more than 50 of its schools had reopened, there were dozens of high-school marching bands in the pre-carnival parades. But the bands were mostly monochromatic – all white or all nonwhite – and 30 of the reopened schools are charter schools. Of course, in the slogan “Bring Back New Orleans” lurks the question of how far back to bring it. Once the wealthy banking powerhouse of the South, New Orleans had been losing economic clout and population for decades before Katrina hit and already seemed doomed to a slow decline.

With Katrina, no one can say what the future holds. Many fear the city will become just a tourist attraction or that it will simply go under in the next major hurricane. The levees and floodwalls are being rebuilt, but not to Category 5 hurricane levels, and the fate of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, the shipping shortcut that funneled the storm's surge right into New Orleans, is still being debated. The Associated Press just re-

The levees and floodwalls are being rebuilt, but not to Category 5 hurricane levels, and the fate of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, the shipping shortcut that funneled the storm's surge right into New Orleans, is still being debated

AFTER KATRINA

Sunken pleasure boats are still in the surrounding waters and one wrecked boat remained on the street in a devastated middle-class neighborhood nearby

ported that more than thirty of the pumps installed last year by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to drain floodwater are defective. (The manufacturer is a crony of Jeb Bush's and, like so many looters of the rebuilding funds, a large-scale donor to the Republican Party.)

The city's major paper, the Times-Picayune, recently revealed that the maps people have been using to represent the amount of wetlands buffer south of the city are 75 years out of date and there are only 10 years left to save anything of this crucially protective marsh-scape, which erodes at the rate of 32 football fields a day.

Signs of life in the Lower Ninth

That doesn't mean people aren't trying all over the city. It's easier, however, to get out the power tools than to untangle the red tape surrounding all the programs that are supposed to fund rebuilding or get governmental agencies at any level to act like they care or are capable of accomplishing a thing.

"Are you trying to rebuild?" I asked the woman who'd come into NENA, the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association in the part of New Orleans most soaked by the floods Katrina caused. She politely but firmly corrected me, "I am going to rebuild."

I ran into this kind of steely will all through my eight days exploring the city. NENA's office in a small stucco church building in the heart of the Lower Ninth, the neighborhood of black homeowners that sustained several feet of water for weeks after the storm, is full of maps and charts. The most remarkable is a map of

the neighborhood itself with every home being rebuilt marked with a green pushpin. They are lightly scattered over the map, but there are green dots on nearly every block and clusters of them in places, about 150 in this small neighborhood that looked as dead as anyplace imaginable not so very long ago.

When I visited the Lower Ninth six months after Katrina, the gaping hole where a barge had disastrously bashed through the levee above the Industrial Canal was still there, as were the cars that had been tossed like toys through the neighborhood when the water rushed in so violently that it tore houses into splinters and shoved them from their foundations. The Lower Ninth was a spooky place – with no services, no streetlights, no inhabitants.

That nothing had been done for six months was appalling, but so was the scale of reconstruction required to bring the place back to life. Throughout New Orleans, even homes that have no structural damage but were in the heavily flooded lowlands have severe water and mold damage. Along with the Ninth Ward, many more middle-class neighborhoods near Lake Pontchartrain also took several feet of water and they too are now but sketchily inhabited. Even the tacky row of condos alongside the Southern Yacht Club on Lake Pontchartrain are still mostly wrecked, though some are being rebuilt. Sunken pleasure boats are still in the surrounding waters and one wrecked boat remained on the street in a devastated middle-class neighborhood nearby.

Across from NENA's headquarters was a FEMA trailer with a wheelchair

ramp in front of one house. In front of another, right next door, a sign spray-painted on plywood read, “NO TRESPASSING NO DEMOLITION. WE ARE COMING BACK.” And printed signs, scattered among those for demolition and building services, bore this message in red, “Come hell and high water! Restoration, revitalization, preservation of the Ninth Ward! Now and forever!” These signs mean something in a neighborhood so gutted and abandoned that many of the street signs disappeared, some of which have since been replaced by hand-painted versions.

That people are even making their own street signs is one sign of a city that has gotten to its feet. Or of citizens who have anyway. Failed by every level of government from the Bush administration and its still barely functional FEMA to the Louisiana bureaucracy with its red-tape-strangled Road Home program to the city government, people are doing it for themselves. NENA was founded by Patricia Jones, an accountant and Lower Ninth homeowner spurred into action by the dire situation, and it’s co-directed by Linda Jackson, a former laundromat owner from the neighborhood. People are doing things they might never otherwise have done, including organizing their communities. Civic involvement is intense – but individual volunteers, no matter how many, from outside and local passion can’t do it all. It’s been said before that New Orleans represents what the Republicans long promised us when they spoke of shrinking government down.

The returnees, Jackson told me, are mostly doing their own rebuilding – but

sheet-rocking and plumbing are far easier to master than the intricate bureaucracies applicants must fight their way through to get the funds that are supposed to be available to them. Even those who are not among New Orleans’ large population of functional illiterates, or whose lack of electricity and money means that sending off the sequences of faxes required to set things in motion is arduous, or who lack the phones and money to make the endless long-distance calls to faceless strangers shuffling or losing their information have problems getting anything done – other than by themselves. Louisiana’s Road Home program, for instance, is such an impenetrable labyrinth that the Times-Picayune recently reported, “Of 108,751 applications received by the Road Home contractor, ICF International, only 782 homeowners have received final payments.” Rents have risen since the storm and home insurance is beyond reach for many of the working-class homeowners who are rebuilding. Others can’t get the homeowner’s insurance they need to get the mortgages to rebuild. In February, State Farm Insurance simply stopped issuing new policies altogether in neighboring and no less devastated Mississippi.

The Great Flood and the Great Divide

The disaster that was Katrina is often regarded as a storm, or a storm and a flood, but in New Orleans it was a storm, a flood, and an urban crisis that has stalled the lives of many to this day. Katrina is not even half over.

Volunteers have been flooding into

Failed by every level of government from the Bush administration and its still barely functional FEMA to the Louisiana bureaucracy with its red-tape-strangled Road Home program to the city government, people are doing it for themselves

AFTER KATRINA

Will the solidarity of many anti-racist whites across the country outweigh the racism that surfaced in Katrina and still lurks not far from the surface

New Orleans since shortly after the hurricane, and they continue to come. Church youth groups arriving to do demolition work were a staple for a while. This time around, I ran across a big group of Mennonite carpenters, some from Canada, doing rebuilding gratis.

Many young people – often just out of college and more excited, as several of them said to me, by “making a difference” than by looking for an entry-level job – have come to the city and many of them appear to be staying. Some have compared the thousands of volunteers to Freedom Summer, the 1964 African-American voter-registration drive in the South staffed in part by college students from the North.

Most of the volunteers in New Orleans are white, and one concern I heard repeatedly is that they may inadvertently contribute to the gentrification of traditionally black neighborhoods such as the Upper Ninth Ward. Others see the outreach of white activists as balm on the wounds inflicted by the racism apparent in the media coverage of, and the militarized response to, Katrina.

The Ninth Ward symbolizes the abandonment of African-Americans by the government in a time of dire need, and bringing it back is a way of redressing that national shame and the racial divide that went with it. But if it does come back, it will be residents and outside volunteers who do it. The government is still largely missing in action – except for the heavily armed soldiers on patrol and the labyrinthine bureaucracies few can navigate.

To rebuild your home, you need a neighborhood. To have a neighborhood,

you need a city. For a viable city, you need some degree of a safe environment. For a safe environment, you need responsibility on the scale of the nation; so, every house in New Orleans, ruined or rebuilding, poses a question about the state of the nation. So many pieces need to be put in place:

What will climate change – both increasingly intense hurricanes and rising seas – do to New Orleans?

Will its economy continue to fade away?

Will the individuals who are bravely rebuilding in the most devastated areas have enough neighbors join them to make viable neighborhoods again? Will the city government improve itself enough to make a better place or will incompetence continue to waltz with corruption through the years?

Will the nation revise its sense of what we owe our most significant cities (before my own city, San Francisco, undergoes the big one) or recognize what they give us?

Will the solidarity of many anti-racist whites across the country outweigh the racism that surfaced in Katrina and still lurks not far from the surface?

Despite its decline, New Orleans remains a port city and a major tourist destination. But it also matters because it's beautiful, with its houses – from shacks to mansions – adorned with feminine, lacy-black ironwork or white, gingerbread wood trim, with its colossal, spreading oaks and the most poetic street names imaginable; because the city and the surrounding delta are the great font from which so much of our popular music flows; because people

there still have a deep sense of connection and memory largely wiped away in so many other places; because it is a capital city for black culture, including traditions that flowed straight from Africa; because, in some strange way, it holds the memory of what life was like before capitalism and may yet be able to teach the rest of us something about what life could be like after capitalism.

One of my friends in New Orleans was telling me recently about the generosity of the city; the ways that churches and charities kept the poor going so that poverty wasn't quite the abandoned thing it too often is elsewhere; the way that people will cook up a feast for a whole neighborhood; the ways the city never fully embraced the holy trinity of the convenient, efficient, and profitable that produce such diminished versions of what life can hold.

The throws – glittery beads, cups, toys – from the carnival floats are a little piece of this. Life in New Orleans is grim in so many ways now, and all the beauty with which I end this letter coexists with the viciousness I began with.

But the recovery of the city from this one mega-disaster could do much for the longer disaster that has so long now been part of our national lives – the social Darwinism, social atomization, the shrinking of the New Deal and the Great Society and the attacks on the very principle that we are all woven together in the fabric we call society. If New Orleans doesn't recover, we aren't likely to either.

We all owe New Orleans and those who suffered most in Katrina a huge debt. Their visible suffering and the vis-

ibly stupid, soulless, and selfish response of the federal government brought an end to the unquestionable dominance of the Bush administration in the nearly four years between New York's great disaster and this catastrophe.

In China, great earthquakes were once thought to be signs that the mandate of heaven has been withdrawn from the ruling dynasty. Similarly, the deluges of Katrina washed away the mandate of the administration and made it possible, even necessary, for those who had been blind or fearful before to criticize and oppose afterwards.

One hundred and one years after my city was nearly destroyed by the incompetent response of the authorities to a major earthquake, we are still sifting out what really happened.

In a hundred years, we may see Katrina as a crisis for the belief that the civil rights movement had moved us past the debacle on the Edmund Pettus Bridge – and as a crisis of legitimacy for a federal government that had done nothing but destroy for five years. **CT**

Rebecca Solnit's essay for Harper's magazine on disaster and civil society went to press the day Katrina struck New Orleans. She recently trained to join San Francisco's Neighborhood Emergency Response Teams in the next big earthquake and hopes to return to New Orleans for a more extended stay in a few months. She is the author of Hope in the Dark, among other books.

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The recovery of the city from this one mega-disaster could do much for the longer disaster that has so long now been part of our national lives – the social Darwinism, social atomization, the shrinking of the New Deal and the Great Society and the attacks on the very principle that we are all woven together in the fabric we call society

A DATE MR BLAIR SHOULD LOOK UP

BY ROBERT FISK

Already, the British had cruelly suppressed a dissident Afghan army – again, sound familiar? – after the British residency had been sacked and its occupants murdered

Out of the frying pan, into the historical fire. If only our leaders read history. In 1915, the British swept up from Basra, believing that the Iraqis would reward them with flowers and love, only to find themselves surrounded at Kut al-Amara, cut down by Turkish shellfire and cholera. Now we are reinforcing Nato in that tomb of the British Army, Afghanistan.

Hands up any soldiers who know that another of Britain's great military defeats took place in the very sands in which your colleagues are now fighting the Taliban. Yes, the Battle of Maiwand – on 27 July, 1880 – destroyed an entire British brigade, overrun by thousands of armed Afghan tribesmen, some of whom the official enquiry into the disaster would later describe as “Talibs”. The Brits had been trying to secure Helmand province. Sound familiar?

Several times already in Helmand, the British have almost been overwhelmed. This has not been officially admitted, but the Ministry of Defence did make a devious allusion to this last

year – it was missed by all the defence correspondents – when it announced that British troops in Helmand had been involved in the heaviest combat fighting “since the Korean War”. The Afghans talk of one British unit which last year had to call in air strikes, destroying almost the entire village in which they were holding out. Otherwise, they would have been overrun.

General Burrows had no close air support on 27 July, 1880, when he found himself confronting up to 15,000 Afghan fighters at Maiwand, but he had large numbers of Egyptian troops with him and a British force in the city of Kandahar. Already, the British had cruelly suppressed a dissident Afghan army – again, sound familiar? – after the British residency had been sacked and its occupants murdered. Britain's reaction at the time was somewhat different from that followed today. Britain's army was run from imperial India where Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, urged his man in Kabul – General Roberts, later Lord Roberts of Kandahar – to crush the uprising with the utmost bru-

tality. “Every Afghan brought to death, I shall regard as one scoundrel the less in a nest of scoundrelism.” Roberts embarked on a reign of terror in Kabul, hanging almost a hundred Afghans.

The commander of the rebellious Afghans was Ayub Khan, whose brother was forced to abdicate as king after the Kabul uprising. When Ayub Khan re-emerged from the deserts of the west – he marched down from that old warlord territory of Herat towards Kandahar – the luckless General Burrows was sent to confront him. Almost a thousand British and Indian troops were to be slaughtered in the coming hours as Ayub Khan’s army fired shells from at least 30 artillery pieces and then charged at them across the fields and dried-up river at Maiwand.

The official British inquiry – it was covered in red cloth and ran to 734 pages – contains many photographs of the landscape over which the battle was fought. The hills and distant mountains, of course, are identical to those that are now videotaped by “embedded” reporters in the British Army.

Outgunned and outmanoeuvred, the British found themselves facing a ruthless enemy. Colonel Mainwaring of the 30th Bombay Infantry wrote a chilling report for the authorities in Delhi. “The whole of the ground... was covered with swarms of ‘ghazis’ and banner-men. The ‘ghazis’ were actually in the ranks of the Grenadiers, pulling the men out and hacking them down with their swords.” The wreckage of the British Army retreated all the way to Kandahar where they were besieged, until rescued by General Roberts him-

self, whose famous march of 10,000 troops from Kandahar – a distance of 300 miles covered in just 20 days – is now military legend.

History, it seems, haunts all our adventures in the Middle East. Who would have believed that after the British reached Baghdad in a 1917 invasion, they would face an insurgency which, in speed and ruthlessness, was an almost exact predecessor to the rebellion which the British and Americans would confront from 2003? Lloyd George, then Prime Minister, stood up in the House of Commons to insist that the British occupation force had to stay in Iraq. Otherwise, he warned, the country would be plunged into civil war. Sound familiar?

One of the greatest defeats of British forces anywhere in the world had occurred more than four decades before Maiwand, on the Kabul Gorge in 1842, when an entire British army was wiped out by Afghan fighters in the snow. The sole survivor, the famous Doctor Brydon, managed to out-horse two armed Afghans and ride into the British compound in Jalalabad.

So now the British are to reinforce Afghanistan yet again. Flying by Chinook to Kandahar will not take as long as General Roberts’s 20 days. British soldiers are unlikely even to enter Kandahar’s central square. But if they do, they might care to look at the few ancient cannon on the main roundabout: all that is left of General Roberts’s artillery. **CT**

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Who would have believed that after the British reached Baghdad in a 1917 invasion, they would face an insurgency which, in speed and ruthlessness, was an almost exact predecessor to the rebellion which the British and Americans would confront from 2003?

A WORLD WHERE LIES BECOME TRUE

BY CHRIS HEDGES

Before Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise, museum visitors are told, all of the dinosaurs were peaceable plant-eaters

“Before they seize power and establish a world according to their doctrines, totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself; in which, through sheer imagination, uprooted masses can feel at home and are spared the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations. The force possessed by totalitarian propaganda – before the movements have the power to drop iron curtains to prevent anyone’s disturbing, by the slightest reality, the gruesome quiet of an entirely imaginary world – lies in its ability to shut the masses off from the real world.”

– Hannah Arendt, **“The Origins of Totalitarianism”**

In the middle of the lobby of the 50,000-square-foot Creation Museum in Petersburg, Ky., a 20-foot waterfall tumbles. Two life-size figures of children with long black hair and in buckskin clothes play in the stream a few feet from two towering

Tyrannosaurus Rex models that can move and roar. The museum, which cost \$25 million to build and has a sea of black asphalt parking lots for school buses, has a scale model of Noah’s ark that shows how Noah solved the problem of fitting dinosaurs into the three levels of the vessel – he loaded only baby dinosaurs. And on the wooden model, infant dinosaurs cavort with horses, giraffes, hippopotamuses, penguins and bears. There is an elaborate display of the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve, naked but strategically positioned so as not to display breasts or genitals, swim in a river as giant dinosaurs and lizards roam the banks.

Before Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise, museum visitors are told, all of the dinosaurs were peaceable plant-eaters. The evidence is found in Genesis 1:30, where God gives “green herb” to every creature to eat. There were no predators. T-Rex had such big teeth, the museum explains, so it could open coconuts. Only after Adam and Eve sinned and were cast out of paradise did the dinosaurs start

to eat flesh. And Adam's sin is a key component of the belief system, for in the eyes of many creationists, in order for Jesus' death to be meaningful it had to atone for Adam's first sin.

The museum has a theater equipped with seats that shake and gadgets that spray mist at the audience as the story of God's six-day creation of the world unfolds on the screen and the sound system rocks the auditorium. There are 30-foot-high walls that represent the cliffs of the Grand Canyon, floors that resemble rocks embedded with fossils, and rooms where a "Christian" paleontologist counters the claims of an "evolutionist" paleontologist.

It has the appearance of a real science museum, complete with a planetarium, a gift shop and plaques on the wall with quotes from creationist "scientists" who have the title doctor conspicuously before their names. It has charts, timelines and graphs with facts and figures. It is meant to be interactive, to create, like Universal Studios, a contrived reality with an array of costly animatronic men and women as well as moving dinosaurs.

Ideological facts

The danger of creationism is that, like the pseudo-science of Nazi eugenics, it allows facts to be accepted or discarded according to the dictates of a preordained ideology.

Creationism removes the follower from the rational, reality-based world. Signs, miracles and wonders occur not only in the daily life of Christians but in history, science, medicine and logic. The belief system becomes the basis to

understand the world. Random facts and data are collected and made to fit into this belief system or discarded. When facts are treated as if they were opinions, when there is no universal standard to determine truth, in law, in science, in scholarship, or in the reporting of the events of the day, the world becomes a place where people can believe what they want to believe, where there is no possibility of reaching any conclusion not predetermined by those who interpret the official, divinely inspired text. This is the goal of creationists.

Other creationist museums are going up in Arkansas, Texas, California, Tennessee and Florida. Museums are part of a massive push to teach creationism in schools, part of a vast Christian publishing and filmmaking industry that seeks to rewrite the past and make it conform to the Bible. The front lines of the culture wars are the classrooms.

The battle is one we are slowly losing. Twenty states are considering changing the way evolution is taught in order to include creationism or intelligent design.¹ Only 13 percent of Americans in a 2004 Gallup poll, when asked for their views on human origins, said life arose from the strictly natural process of evolution. More than 38 percent said they believed God guided evolution, and 45 percent said the Genesis account of creation was a true story.²

Courses on intelligent design have been taught at Minnesota, Georgia, New Mexico and Iowa State universities, along with Wake Forest, not to

The danger of creationism is that, like the pseudo-science of Nazi eugenics, it allows facts to be accepted or discarded according to the dictates of a preordained ideology

CREATING HISTORY

The use of mass-marketing techniques to persuade and convince, rather than brainwash, has led tens of millions of followers to accept the toxic totalitarian line by tricking them into believing it's their own

mention Christian universities that teach all science through the prism of the Bible.

The museum is an illustration of the movement's marriage of primitive and intolerant beliefs with the modern tools of technology, mass communication, sophisticated fundraising and political organization. Totalitarian systems usually start as propagandistic movements that ostensibly teach people to "believe what they want."

This is a ruse. This primacy of personal opinion, regardless of facts, destabilizes and destroys the primacy of all facts. This process leads inevitably to the big lie. Facts are useful only if they bolster the message. The use of mass-marketing techniques to persuade and convince, rather than brainwash, has led tens of millions of followers to accept the toxic totalitarian line by tricking them into believing it's their own. Ironically, at the outset the movement seemingly encourages people to think "independently" or "courageously."

Iron control

At first all have, in the totalitarian belief system, a right to an opinion, or, in short, a right to believe anything. Soon, under the iron control of an empowered totalitarian movement, facts become worthless, kept or discarded according to an ideological litmus test. And once these movements achieve power, facts are ruthlessly manipulated or kept hidden to support the lie. Creationism is not about offering an alternative. Its goal is the destruction of the core values of the open society – the ability to think for oneself, to draw in-

dependent conclusions, to express dissent when judgment and common sense tell you something is wrong, to be self-critical, to challenge authority, to advocate for change and to accept that there are other views, different ways of being, that are morally and socially acceptable. We are beginning to see the growing intolerance that comes with the empowerment of these ideologues. There is a bill in the Texas Legislature to strip all mention of evolution from Texas school textbooks and institute mandatory Bible classes for all students. This is just the start.

And yet, coming from the modern age, these Christo-fascists cannot discount science. They employ jargon, methods and data that appear to be science, to make an argument for creationism. They have created parallel research and scholarly institutions. They pump out articles in self-published journals to provide "evidence" that homosexuals can be cured, that global warming is a myth, that abortion can cause breast cancer, that something they call "post-abortion syndrome" leads to deep depression and suicide and that abstinence-only education is an effective form of birth control.

This pseudo-science has seeped into the public debate. It is disseminated by nervous and timid media anxious to give both sides in every argument. Those who have contempt for facts and truth, for honest research and inquiry, are given the same platform by the press as those who deal in a world of reality, fact and rationality.

The movement desperately needs the imprint of science to legitimize it-

self. It achieves this imprint by discrediting real science and claiming creationist science as true science.

All attempts to argue the creationists out of their mythical belief, to persuade them with logic, evidence, scientific inquiry and fact, will fail. They have created a “fundamentalist science.”

They know they cannot return to the pre-Darwinian innocence that let them believe the Bible alone was enough. They need, in the midst of their flight from reality, to reassure their followers that science, science not contaminated by secular humanists and nonbelievers, is on their side. In this they are a distinctly modern movement. They seek the imprint of science and scholarship to legitimize myth.

This is a characteristic they share with all modern totalitarian movements, which co-opt the disciplines of law, science, medicine and scholarship to give a modern veneer to their primitive and superstitious belief systems, systems that allow the rulers to dictate reality and truth.

The “paraprofessional” organizations formed by the Christian right, organizations of teachers, journalists, doctors, lawyers and scientists, mimic the activities of real professional

groups. They seek to challenge the legitimacy and the power of the traditional organizations.

The duplication of the structures and methods employed by the non-totalitarian world, the use of pseudo-science to dress up fantasy, is slowly undermining our legitimate scientific and educational institutions. It is destroying the foundations of our open society.

It is ushering us into a world where lies are true. **CT**

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NOTES

1. Scott LaFee, “Local scientists, doctors and professors talk about ‘intelligent design,’ “ The San Diego Union-Tribune, F-1, June 8, 2005.
2. Frank Newport, “Third of Americans Say Evidence Has Supported Darwin’s Evolution Theory,” The Gallup Poll, Nov. 19, 2004, <http://poll.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?ci=14107&pg=1>.

Chris Hedges, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and former Pulitzer-prize winning foreign correspondent for The New York Times, is the author of American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America

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WRONG QUESTION

BY YONATAN MENDEL

This annual meeting of Israeli and foreign politicians, academics, military experts and businessmen has become one of the most prestigious platforms for delivering political points and geostrategic messages

I was still at Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv when my mobile rang. Rottem, the head of the news department, asked me how I was doing. ‘They opened up my belly last night,’ I grumbled, ‘took my appendix out, closed me up with staple pins and left.’ It hurt. ‘Well, you sound like you’re all right now,’ he said rather bluntly. ‘I’m sure you can make it to the Herzliya Conference in two days’ time. There’s a panel about Iran or Lebanon or something from your field, and I want you to cover it.’ Before I could decide on an answer – this was an attractive offer for a beginner journalist – he went on: ‘Actually, I’ve put your name down on the list.’ I looked at the nurse coming towards me and asked for a painkiller.

Two days later, I woke up in my small apartment in Tel Aviv, and while struggling to put on my shoes, cursed the moment I failed to say no. The bottom right of my abdomen was aching. My rendezvous with Israel’s biggest strategic threats looked like a very bad idea. I could not have believed that by the end of the day I would have rather

had open-heart surgery than listen to any further analysis of the Middle East.

Inside the taxi I reopened the conference kit that had been emailed to me. It was the first time I had been to the event, but as an Israeli I knew its importance.

Since the first conference in 2000, this annual meeting of Israeli and foreign politicians, academics, military experts and businessmen has become one of the most prestigious platforms for delivering political points and geostrategic messages. In 2003 Ariel Sharon unveiled the Gaza disengagement plan at Herzliya and since then the significance of the event has only grown.

This year the conference was to be broadcast live on Israeli news sites, and attended by at least ten government ministers, including Prime Minister Olmert. Forty-two well-known American figures – among them, the deputy secretary of defense, the under-secretary of state for political affairs and the secretary of education – were to take part. Only two Palestinian citizens of Israel were invited, even though Pales-

tinians make up 20 per cent of the country's population.

On the front page of the kit was a brief survey of the subjects that were going to be considered. The overall theme is always 'The Balance of Israel's National Security', and Professor Uzi Arad, the director and founder, made the point that this year's conference had been convened 'amidst the repercussions of the *campaign* in Lebanon, regional and international developments, and their implications for Israel's security and diplomatic postures' (my emphasis).

In an interview with Haaretz recorded before the conference but published after it ended, Arad said that 'the Israeli left will need to realise that it makes up only 50 per cent of the conference, unlike the 90 per cent presence it has in any other event.' A former Mossad senior official and Benjamin Netanyahu's foreign policy adviser, Arad went on to insist that 'my individual political views are one thing, and what is happening at the conference is another.' A true Voltairean.

Empty courtyard

The taxi driver said we had arrived. We were at the main gate of the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya, the first private university in Israel. The courtyard was empty, and the gatekeeper told us that if we were looking for the Herzliya Conference it was taking place at the Daniel Hotel. Slightly embarrassed, I turned to the taxi driver and asked him to take us to the correct location, a five-star hotel on the Herzliya seashore, one of Israel's wealthiest spots.

I took advantage of the extra time in the taxi, and the heavy traffic of Herzliya's mornings, to get a better understanding of what I was supposed to cover. The panel was entitled 'The Changing Paradigm of Israeli-Palestinian Relations in the Shadow of Iran and the War against the Hizbullah'.

The session was to be chaired by a former Israeli ambassador to the UN, Dore Gold, who is currently president of the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs. I vaguely remembered coming across one of his books as an undergraduate at Tel Aviv University: *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism*.

The second speaker was Professor Bernard Lewis of Princeton University. I knew his work well – who didn't? The title of one of his books encapsulates his views: *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*. Clash of Civilisations: here we come.

The third speaker was Moshe Yaalon, the former Israeli chief of staff. After his retirement in 2005 he told Haaretz that the Palestinians were still looking for ways to exterminate Israel; therefore Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders would never solve the conflict. It was Yaalon who introduced the notion – these are his words – of searing deep 'into the consciousness of the Palestinians that they are a defeated people'. He now works at the Shalem Centre, an education and research institution that is identified with the Israeli right and American neo-conservatives.

I assumed that the panel would in-

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The crowd applauded. It isn't every day that Israelis and their American supporters get to hear that they have nothing to do with the instability of the region

clude at least one speaker who thought differently from his colleagues and started to feel bad for the fourth speaker. Poor fellow, I thought, facing those three. I read on. The poor fellow was revealed to be James Woolsey, a former director of the CIA. I knew nothing about him. I googled his name and found out that in July Woolsey had called on the US to bomb Syria. My stitches started hurting again. I didn't have time to catch my breath: the driver told me to pick myself up because we were in front of the hotel. I paid and limped towards the entrance.

The hotel lobby was beautifully arranged. The room was wide with large windows overlooking the Herzliya beach: the view dazzled the eyes. I went over to the journalists' stand, gave them my best smile and nonchalantly pulled out my press card. A feeling of importance came over me. The world outside was forgotten. The woman behind the desk checked my details, smiled back at my smiling face and gave me my conference tag. I was accepted.

I was then allowed to climb to the second floor, where a large buffet was on offer to anyone who hadn't lost their appetite at the prospect of the *Shadow of Iran and the War against the Hizbullah*. I decided to stick to my job and went straight to the conference hall, leaving the tempting croissants behind. I found myself a good seat, close to the stage but not too close, and felt ready to hear how threatening Ahmadinejad's shadow was. More and more people crowded in and eventually filled every corner of the hall.

Dore Gold was the first speaker. 'John Negroponte,' he began, 'US director of national intelligence, said a week ago that in the Middle East, Iran and its neighbours see a strategic move. The influence of Iran is rising beyond its nuclear programme. The fall of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, the increase in oil incomes, the victory of Hamas in the elections and the perceived victory of Hizbullah in its war against Israel increased Iran's shadow in the region.'

According to Gold, this 'shift' had been sensed by the researchers of his institution as early as the beginning of 2006. He said that, due to this 'historic turning point', Israel and the West needed to re-evaluate their positions. The paradigm that claims that the source of instability in the region is the Israeli-Arab conflict, and that solving this would bring stability to the region, was no longer valid. A new paradigm had to be found: a new paradigm for a new era.

New demon

The crowd applauded. It isn't every day that Israelis and their American supporters get to hear that they have nothing to do with the instability of the region. The US invasion of Iraq? Israel's forty-year occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip? Israel's continual refusal to reply to the Syrians' proposals for negotiations? All of these are part of the past. Fortunately, a new demon had been found to take everybody's sins on himself: Ahmadinejad.

Professor Bernard Lewis spoke next. It was the first time I had heard him speak. He started by explaining that

the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of a period that had begun two hundred years before, with the landing of Napoleon Bonaparte's forces in Egypt.

Nowadays, Lewis said, 'the outside powers are not as interested in the Middle East as they were.' This meant that the region had returned to its old patterns. The crowd held its breath: Islam's desire to conquer the West was in the air. Lewis confirmed it. He said that the Muslims' first attempt to conquer the world took place in Europe in the eighth century, and the second took place when the Ottomans occupied Constantinople in the 15th century. 'What we see today,' he concluded, 'is the third attempt, with aspirations that it will be third time lucky . . . We see in Muslim writings that the struggle has already begun.'

Lewis coughed, and continued with his forecast. 'My Iranian friends tell me that Ahmadinejad might be crazy, but he is not stupid. He really means what he says, and he really believes in an apocalyptic message.' Lewis left no room for doubt: there is a widespread understanding, he said, that a religious war between Gog and Magog is on its way.

The professor returned to his seat. I held my pen tight, as if it was my last friend on earth. After a few seconds I started breathing. The crowd was still applauding. I couldn't understand why such a distinguished professor was not willing to lift the fog over Iran by supplying even the most basic facts. Why didn't he mention that Ahmadinejad has no control over Iran's nuclear pro-

gramme, or its army, or any of its security forces, or any of its strategic plans; and that even if he was both stupid and crazy he would still be unable to make these kinds of decision? Why did Lewis, an expert on the Middle East, not find it appropriate to mention that power over Iran lies entirely in the hands of the supreme leader Ali Khamenei? Was it because such an explanation might put paid to the unity of the panel or stand in the way of the audience's notion that a pre-emptive attack was needed? We wanted a war so much.

Straight to the point

James Woolsey stepped up to the podium. He was sharp, focused and serious, exactly as a former head of the CIA should be. He went straight to the point and very soon touched on the audience's most sensitive point: the Holocaust. The Iranian, Iraqi, Lebanese and Syrian 'challenges', according to Woolsey, should correctly and jointly be thought of as 'Islamist totalitarianism', the 'defeat of which I believe is the great challenge of our age, just as the defeat of Nazism and the defeat of Communism were'.

There were sparkling eyes in the audience, and he was heading for glory. 'Destroying Israel and the US is the essence of the Iranian state,' Woolsey said, 'and trying to convince Iran to stop it is like trying to convince Hitler not to be anti-semitic.' The crowd was now his. Woolsey didn't lose his momentum. 'I agree with Dr Gold,' he said, as he looked over at the panellists. 'Wahhabi Islam, al-Qaida and Vilayat

Why did Lewis, an expert on the Middle East, not find it appropriate to mention that power over Iran lies entirely in the hands of the supreme leader Ali Khamenei? Was it because such an explanation might put paid to the unity of the panel or stand in the way of the audience's notion that a pre-emptive attack was needed?

Someone rose to his feet. And someone else, and someone else, and someone else. I looked at the audience, amazed. They were cheering as one

e-Faqih cannot be treated individually. Those who say that they will not cooperate with one another are as wrong as those who claimed that the Nazis and Communists would not cooperate.'

The audience couldn't contain its excitement and started clapping riotously. Woolsey kept his grip. 'We should listen to what they say,' he said, silencing the crowd, 'just like we needed to listen to Hitler.'

An attentive silence spread through the room. 'We must not accept totalitarian regimes,' he said, 'and we should not tolerate a nuclear weapon capability for Iran . . . If we use force, we should use it decisively, not execute some surgical strike on a single or two or three facilities. We need to destroy the power of the Vilayat e-Faqih if we are called upon and forced to use force against Iran.' Next Woolsey took his audience to Syria. 'It is a shame,' he said, that Israel and the US failed to 'participate in a move against Syria last summer'.

He paused. 'Finally,' he said, looking into his audience's eyes, 'we must not forget who we are. We, as Jews, Christians and others, are heirs of the tradition deriving from Judaism.' Woolsey chose an American and Jewish ending. 'Elijah had it right in confronting Ahab, and Thomas Jefferson had it right in the one sentence of his that circles your head as you stand in front of his statue in Washington DC: "I have sworn on the altar of almighty God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."'

The audience went wild; Woolsey had outlined the ultimate battle be-

tween good and evil and they were on the side of good. Someone rose to his feet. And someone else, and someone else, and someone else. I looked at the audience, amazed. They were cheering as one.

This wasn't funny. Israel is the strongest country in the Middle East, the only country in the region with nuclear power, the only state that cooperates unquestioningly with the world's only superpower. Why do we have such a short memory? Why don't we remember the circumstances that led to the invasion of Iraq and the 600,000 Iraqis who have died over the last four years? Why are Israelis so eager to fight Syria, when Damascus seems to want to sit down and talk? How can the nation that suffered immeasurably in the Holocaust let people use the memory of six million Jews as an instrument to gain international support?

Trojan Horse

The next speaker allowed me to focus on something other than the Holocaust. Happily, Yaalon, the former Israeli chief of staff, wasn't saying anything new, so I could relax a bit. Like his colleagues, he said that solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ending the Israeli occupation would not bring stability to the region. Then he said that the Palestinians had agreed to the Oslo Accords because they wanted to use them as a Trojan Horse – as an excuse to enter negotiations and then fight for more. I was reminded of David Ben-Gurion, who accepted the partition plan in 1947, but told his followers it was only a step towards gaining more

territory. Yaalon went on. He said Palestinian children were being brought up on 'hatred and death'. He said: 'the conflict after the 1979 revolution in Iran turned into a clash of civilisations. This is the Third World War.' Surprisingly, the Israeli ex-general had a solution and unsurprisingly it had a lot to do with armies. 'If the West yearns for life,' he said, 'it cannot run away from a confrontation with Jihadi Islam, and – first and foremost – with the Iranian regime.' He had no doubts: 'There will not be an inner change in Iran without external pressure.' A controversial claim: what about the students in Iran burning photos of Ahmadinejad? What about the victory of the reformists at the last municipal elections? Or the fact that Iran is the only country in the Middle East apart from Israel to hold regular democratic elections and where the leadership changes every few years?

Yaalon's speech didn't go down as well as Woolsey's, but he, too, had given the audience what they wanted: yes, there would be a war with Iran. Yes, it is Israel's only option. And no, Israel has nothing to do with the continuing crises in the Middle East. But the audience's applause still didn't make sense. If a war with Iran broke out, wouldn't Israel be in great danger? I could understand American listeners cheering: a missile from Iran could never hit their houses, but why are Israelis walking towards (another) military confrontation without asking themselves what the consequences might be? And without fear?

The chairman announced that the

time had come for questions from the floor. I felt a bit dizzy when I stood up and headed towards the queue for the microphone. I remember hearing someone ask when exactly the war would start, and why had Israel failed to win the war in Lebanon; there were other questions that might as well have been asked by the panellists themselves. I waited for my turn, and when it came I started shivering. What the hell am I doing, I wondered. I imagined being crushed by the mighty lords of war sitting in front of me.

My question

I waited a few seconds and said: 'My name is Yoni Mendel and I am from Walla News Israel. I would like to ask Mr Woolsey a question, because it deals with US foreign policy.' Woolsey looked at me, and I considered forgetting about my question and instead putting in a request to be sent to Iraq or Iran or Vietnam. I tried to keep focused and said: 'The four of you represent the same point of view.'

Four pairs of eyes were now staring at me. 'But there are also other views. Professor David Menashri, the head of the Tel Aviv Iranian Studies Department, and Ephraim Halevy, the former head of Mossad, have argued on various occasions that a dialogue with Iran, or even a secret negotiation channel with the US, could be the solution to the crisis.'

Chairman Gold interrupted. 'What is your question?' he said loudly. I hesitated and said: 'As one can see, since the US included Iran in the Axis of Evil in 2001 the opposite of what it intended

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I wanted to tell them that when Iran elected a local democrat and reformist, Muhammad Mussadeq, in 1953, to replace the US puppet shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, and to end US control over Iranian oil, the CIA used covert operations to overthrow him and to bring back the hated and unelected shah; but it was too late for me to say anything

has taken place: the reformists of Khatami lost power, the conservatives of Ahmadinejad gained power and the nuclear programme was speeded up.' I heard Gold's voice over mine: 'Could you shorten your question, our next guest, the minister of defence, is waiting outside.' I tried not to think about the minister. 'Well, the question is: don't you think that American policy is not helping to halt the Iranian nuclear programme, but contributes to the exact opposite?'

There was giggling around me. Woolsey didn't hesitate. 'I think that's nonsense,' he said. The crowd applauded: an easy knockout. My stitches felt as though they were about to explode.

Woolsey went on: 'I think that there was a window of opportunity between Khatami's taking office and the spring of 1995 when one could responsibly hold the view that he might be embarked on major changes for Iran. But the crackdown came in the spring of 1995: students were killed, editors were killed, prisoners were tortured, and since then there has been no reasonable chance of working with anything approaching a moderate Iranian regime.' 'And today,' he concluded, 'I don't believe that anybody who knows anything about Iran, frankly, believes that serious negotiations are possible.'

I remember hearing applause. I wanted to ask Mr Woolsey what he meant by the time between Khatami's taking office and the spring of 1995, when Khatami took office in 1997 and retired in 2005. I wondered if by the 'spring of 1995' he meant the American decision

to impose sanctions on Iran, and if yes, how come the 'window of opportunity' was shut then, when Khatami, the moderate president of Iran, came to power two years later and was there for eight years. I wanted to make it clear to the audience that Ahmadinejad has served as Iran's president for the last year and eight months and not for the last 12 years, as they might be confused. I wanted to tell them that when Iran elected a local democrat and reformist, Muhammad Mussadeq, in 1953, to replace the US puppet shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, and to end US control over Iranian oil, the CIA used covert operations to overthrow him and to bring back the hated and unelected shah; but it was too late for me to say anything.

Lunatic Israeli Jew

Chairman Gold sent us all out for a short break before the speech from the minister of defence. I tried to avoid the stares of the audience; they wanted to see close up what a lunatic Israeli Jew looked like. One of them asked me: 'Did you ever study history?' I told him about my master's degree in history. He said: 'If you had been studying properly you would have seen the similarities between Iran and the Nazis.' I was glad he hadn't been marking my exams and headed for the exit.

Someone from an organisation called Demography held me up to say that he too was against the occupation and against the separation wall, 'but also against the Arabs'. I didn't reply. I was a minority of one, but I wasn't ready to be eaten alive. I left the hall,

without even saying goodbye to the lovely croissants, and ran outside for some fresh air. I phoned my boss and shamefully reported that among a pro-war audience with pro-war experts in a pro-war country I had asked a stupid question. Rottem told me not to worry too much. I was cheered to think I hadn't lost my job.

On my way back in the taxi I thought about the term 'groupthink', which tries to explain how a state of mind can penetrate all levels of society and bring about a general stagnation in thinking. When Israeli sociologists tried to understand why Israel hadn't been ready for the 1973 war, they coined the term 'the conception': all levels of society were under the sway of a 'conception' based on the euphoria of 1967. It felt to me as though the Israeli and American peoples were now under the sway of another 'conception'. It is not categorically wrong – Iran might indeed achieve a nuclear capability – but there is no discussion in Israel about ways to deal with it and whether there is an alternative to confrontation.

An honest debate, with more than one point of view, is the minimum required before reaching critical conclusions. But current Israeli discourse – Israeli common sense – does not allow for dissenting voices, or take into account inconvenient facts. Israeli politics, the academy, the security establishment, and even the press: they all think alike. There is only one message.

Two days after the panel discussion, when Prime Minister Olmert addressed the conference, he confirmed it: 'We will not let the Iranian regime put the

life of the Israeli people under threat,' he said. 'We have absolute freedom of action to defend our vital interests. And we will not hesitate to use it.'

Three days earlier, Senator John Edwards, a candidate for the Democratic nomination in next year's presidential election, reassured the Herzliya Conference that the US, whether Democrat or Republican, is on the same warpath as Israel. 'Under no circumstance,' he said, 'can Iran be allowed to have nuclear weapons . . . Iran must know that the world won't back down . . . We need to keep all options on the table. Let me reiterate – all options must remain on the table.'

Unified by threats

The Herzliya Conference has enormous significance in Israeli society. Is it because we worship anything that has to do with the security establishment? Or maybe because 'strategic threats' – and Israel even has a minister devoted to them – are the only thing that can unite a society that is torn apart by so many differences? Are we really under continual threat, or are we perpetuating the situation by letting our generals and security-minded leadership dictate a course of action that is about much more than security? This is the way Israel has always thought. The Herzliya Conference demonstrates Israel's core belief that the US is its guardian angel, an angel that is never wrong, whose use of force will eventually make Israel a safer place.

I was depressed not only because of what was said but also because of what wasn't said, and depressed for those

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who were not saying it. Out of more than 160 participants in the conference, there were only 17 women.

Of the two Palestinian citizens of Israel who took part, only one, Aida Touma-Sliman, a member of the Follow-Up Committee for the Arab Population of Israel, contributed a different message. The other, Ramzi Halabi from Tel Aviv University, is a Druze who has reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the Israeli army.

The worst of it is that – among the audience, the media, the participants, the politicians, the academics – almost no one felt that something or someone was absent. There was no fault found in a conference that excluded communities because they were not Jewish, American, militant or manly enough. How can an audience go on clapping their hands at a discussion that is discussion-free?

On the eve of a war with Iran, a war with unknown consequences, Israelis

refuse even to consider an option that does not involve violence. A country that has lived by the sword refuses to question it, even when its own future is at risk. I think of the frog and scorpion story. I do not know who the frog is here, but I do have a strong sense that Israel is playing the scorpion: It cannot stop behaving the way it has always behaved, even when this is against its own interests.

A postscript. Out of the eight questions asked of the panel only seven were published on the official Herzliya Conference internet site. Guess who didn't get lucky. **CT**

Yonatan Mendel is Walla News Israel correspondent for the Middle East.

The Other Side of Iran, a series of six articles, will be published online in the next few weeks.

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UNGRATEFUL VICIOUS IRAQIS

BY BARRY LANDO

It's time for the Iraqis to cease their bloody sectarian rivalries, disband their ruthless militias and death squads and take responsibility for their country's fate. Why should American boys continue dying to save Iraqis from their own perverse selves?

It's a view expressed by all sides in the U.S. four years after the 2003 invasion. The problem is it shows no understanding of Iraq's nightmarish past and calamitous psychological present.

Take, for instance, the report of a group of Harvard medical researchers who found that the children of Iraq were "the most traumatized children of war ever described." The experts concluded that "a majority of Iraq's children would suffer from severe psychological problems throughout their lives." (Additional citations for this material are in my book, *Web of Deceit: The History of Western Complicity in Iraq, from Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush*)

That appalling judgment was rendered not recently but 16 years ago, in May 1991. Consider what Iraqis had al-

ready endured at that point: From September, 1980 to August, 1988 more than a million Iraqis and Iranians died in what was the longest war of the twentieth century. As that conflict raged, Saddam also launched his genocidal attacks against the Kurds – which Presidents Reagan and Bush Senior – then Saddam's de facto allies against Iran did their best to ignore.

Next came Saddam's disastrous invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 – there again the U.S. played a hand—followed by an abortive popular uprising against Saddam. That revolt, which George Bush's father had called for, ended with Saddam's slaughter of tens of thousands of Shiites – as U.S. troops stood by.

At the same time, the United Nations Security Council was implementing a Draconian embargo on all trade with Iraq. Indeed, when the Harvard study cited above was carried out, those sanctions had been in effect for only seven months. They cut off all trade between Iraq and the rest of the world. That meant everything, from food and

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FOUR YEARS LATER

"The U.S. theory behind the sanctions was that if you hurt the people of Iraq and kill the children particularly, they'll rise up with anger and overthrow Saddam"

electric generators to vaccines, hospital equipment – even medical journals. Since Iraq imported 70% of its food, and its principle revenues were derived from the export of petroleum, the sanctions had an immediate and catastrophic impact.

Enforced primarily by the United States and Great Britain, they remained in place for almost 13 years and were in their own way a weapon of mass destruction far more deadly than anything Saddam had developed. Two U.N. administrators who oversaw humanitarian relief in Iraq during that period, and resigned in protest, consider the embargo to have been a “crime against humanity.”

Elimination of Saddam

Early on it became evident that for the United States and England, the real objective of the sanctions was not the elimination of Saddam Hussein's WMD but of Saddam Hussein himself, though that goal went far beyond anything authorized by the Security Council. The effect of the sanctions was magnified by the wide-scale destruction of Iraq's infrastructure – power plants, sewage treatment facilities, telephone exchanges, irrigation systems – wrought by the air and rocket attacks preceding the war. Iraq's contaminated waters became a biological killer as lethal as anything Saddam had attempted to produce.

There were massive outbreaks of severe child and infant dysentery. Typhoid and cholera, which had been virtually eradicated in Iraq, also packed the hospital wards.

Added to that was a disastrous shortage of food, which meant malnutrition for some, starvation and death for others. At the same time, the medical system, once the country's pride, was careening towards total collapse. Iraq would soon have the worst child mortality rate of all 188 countries measured by UNICEF.

There is no question that U.S. planners knew what the awful impact of the sanctions would be. The health calamity was first predicted and then carefully tracked by the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency. Their first study was entitled “Iraq's Water Treatment Vulnerabilities.”

Indeed, from the beginning the intent of U.S. officials was to create such a catastrophic situation that the people of Iraq – civilians but particularly the military – would be forced to react. As Dennis Halliday, the former U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, put it to me, “the U.S. theory behind the sanctions was that if you hurt the people of Iraq and kill the children particularly, they'll rise up with anger and overthrow Saddam.”

But rather than weakening Saddam, the sanctions only consolidated his hold on power. The government's rationing system became vital to the survival of the people, even though it provided less than a third of a person's nutritional requirements. Iraqis were so obsessed with simply keeping their families alive that there was little interest or energy to plot the overthrow of one of the most ruthless dictatorships on the planet. “The people didn't hold Saddam responsible for their plight,” Dennis Hal-

liday said. “They blamed the US and the UN for these sanctions and the pain and anger that these sanctions brought to their lives.”

By now it was clear that sanctions and the terrible sacrifices they were exacting from the people of Iraq would not rid the world of Saddam Hussein. But rather than ending the sanctions or modifying them to target those items truly crucial to building WMD, the Clinton administration continued the futile policy: decimating an entire nation in order to destroy one leader.

Neither for the first nor the last time, the people of Iraq were victims of failed U.S. policy.

The Oil for Food program which was introduced in 1996 and expanded over the following years was billed as a major humanitarian measure by the U.S. It allowed Iraq to sell unlimited amounts of petroleum to pay for vital imports, not just food. But Hans Von Sponeck, who also resigned his post as U.N. coordinator in Iraq, condemned the program as “a fig leaf for the international community.”

The simple fact is that Iraq didn't have much petroleum to sell. The country's ability to pump oil had been crippled by the bombings and sanctions. Because of other restrictions imposed by the Security Council, only \$28 billion actually arrived in Iraq. That had to cover not just food but all Iraq's imports. That amounted to \$170 per person per year which, as one analyst pointed out, is less than one half the annual per capita income of Haiti, the most destitute nation of the Western Hemisphere.

There is no question that Saddam ripped off money during the sanctions regime to attempt to rebuild his military and support his family's lavish lifestyle, but that point hides the basic issue: Iraq's needs were enormous. Even if Saddam had invested everything he skimmed from the sanctions into rebuilding his country and feeding his people, those sums would have never prevented the colossal devastation that sanctions brought about.

Smuggled petroleum

Of course Saddam profited by smuggling petroleum to neighboring countries. But, according to the Volcker Commission set up to investigate charges of corruption under the sanctions regime, the great bulk of those illicit activities were known about – and accepted – by the U.S.-dominated Sanctions Committee. Because the other countries involved in the smuggling – Turkey, Jordan and Syria – had powerful allies on the Security Council, the delegates closed their eyes to what was going on.

By the time the sanctions were finally removed, May 22, 2003, after the U.S.-led invasion, an entire generation of Iraqis had been decimated by the failed policy. A Unicef study in 1999 concluded that half a million Iraqi children perished in the previous eight years because of the sanctions – and that was four years before they ended. Another American expert in 2003 estimated that the sanctions had killed between 343,900 to 529,000 young children and infants. The exact number will never be known. It was, however, certainly

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FOUR YEARS LATER

It is that generation of "the most traumatized children of war ever described," who have come of age and been engulfed by the cataclysm that is Iraq today. It is they who – if they have not fled the country – also make up much of the insurgencies, the militias, the criminal gangs, the death squads

more young people than were ever killed by Saddam Hussein.

(In a statement right out of Orwell on March 27, 2003 Tony Blair actually cited the dramatic increase in infant mortality in Iraq to justify the invasion.)

Beyond the death and destruction of infrastructure, the sanctions had another, equally devastating, but less visible impact, as documented early in 1991 by the group of Harvard medical researchers. They reported that four out of five children interviewed were fearful of losing their families; two thirds doubted whether they themselves would survive to adulthood. The experts concluded that a majority of Iraq's children would suffer from severe psychological problems throughout their lives. "The trauma, the loss, the grief, the lack of prospects, the feeling of threat here and now, that it will all start again, the impact of the sanctions, make us ask if these children are not the most suffering child population on earth."

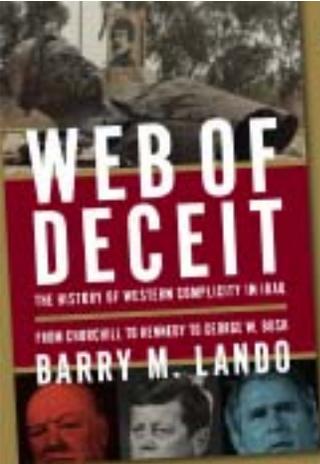
Those sanctions, we reemphasize, lasted for another 12 years after that

study – terminating only with the American led invasion of Iraq which unleashed the current debacle.

It is that generation of "the most traumatized children of war ever described," who have come of age and been engulfed by the cataclysm that is Iraq today. It is they who – if they have not fled the country – also make up much of the insurgencies, the militias, the criminal gangs, the death squads. It is also they, as the new military and police commanders, bureaucrats and legislators, who are confronted with governing this anarchic land.

It is also they, as the months pass, who will be increasingly blamed – along with the Democrat controlled congress – for America's ultimate failure in Iraq. **CT**

Barry Lando, a former 60 Minutes producer, is the author of Web of Deceit: The History of Western Complicity in Iraq from Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush. He also blogs at Barrylando.com



WEB OF DECEIT THE HISTORY OF WESTERN COMPLICITY IN IRAQ FROM CHURCHILL TO KENNEDY TO GEORGE W. BUSH BARRY M. LANDO

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MARCHING TO NOWHERE

BY DAVID RUBINSON

I joined tens of thousands of people of every kind from all over in Washington's freezing wind on the fourth anniversary of the Iraq War to march on the Pentagon, after a week of multiple actions and protests, including the encampment at the Capitol, arrests inside the Rayburn building where none of We The People were allowed into Our House to witness the Co-Conspirators' cha cha cha, and an action by 3,000 Christian Anti War Activists with multiple arrests in the sleet and snow.

Brave and hearty souls, all of 'em. But . . . If we want the war to stop, if we want seriously to cause change, we're going to have to dump these worn out old models, and the obsolete 1967 style Protest March. What worked in 1967 works no more.

We took one last ride in the old sedan, and – as well as the old boy has served us over the years, as comfy as it is to ride in, as much as it revives warm memories of granpa and granma and how we did so much Good when we were kids – it's time to stuff it and hang it on the wall.

In truth, these “demonstrations” and “marches” do more to harm our cause than to serve it.

The marches are full of bonhomie, solidarity, and spirit, but essentially are easily ignored marches to nowhere. The demonstrations or rallies are boring, endlessly verbose and hopelessly diffused affairs, run apparently more to satisfy the egos of their promoters than to provide lightning rods or impetus for change.

The major pimp media and the enforcers of the status quo use the meager attendance at these events to prove their case: that those against the war are a marginal few, and a motley disjointed few at that.

It was not the bad weather, or the logistical difficulties, or the lack of media exposure that kept tens of millions away from this and many other demonstrations. It was that the event itself, like so many before – was going to be one more unfocused and unproductive snore.

What exactly was the POINT ?

The organizers accepted the restric-

The demonstrations or rallies are boring, endlessly verbose and hopelessly diffused affairs, run apparently more to satisfy the egos of their promoters than to provide lightning rods or impetus for change

GANDHI'S LESSON

If we want to change anything, we'd better do something new, and be quick about it

tions laid out by the cops, started on the outskirts of town, and then left town completely. We needed to be in the middle of town, in the middle of the week, and on the doorsteps of those funding, running and supporting this war, not on a weekend in a dingy inconspicuous parking lot well out of the earshot and view of anyone even slightly involved with the war. We did not need speeches, we needed to stop the machine. Stop business as usual.

What is it that compels people to repeat acts that do not work? What is it that causes pretty smart folks to rely on and invest expectations in others, like those in Congress, to end this war for us, when we all know that they have done, and will do, nothing of the kind?

Of course, we show up and feel better because we see people who share our views, and can vent some feelings about the way things are being done – in a supportive environment of like-minded souls. But damned few of us are showing up, and when we do, nothing really happens, and absolutely nothing changes.

So, if we want to make ourselves feel better, we can keep marching and chanting and carrying smart signs and we can continue to write or email or fax or call our Congresspeople. If we want to change anything, we'd better do something new, and be quick about it.

Along the march route, we encountered a good sized group of Pro War demonstrators, many of them Vietnam Vets. These are people who cannot accept that what they and many of their buddies and families sacrificed for was meaningless, who are stuck – in that

period of their lives when they could feel strong, powerful, potent; with life and death in their hands, and shared purpose in their daily lives. Who have never again felt as good as when they could strap on the M-16, and kick some slope ass.

There was more real dialogue about the war in the confrontations between these vets and the protestors, than we have heard or seen in Congress or the major media in six years, including the last three months under Pelosi's Posseurs. Is there more self-delusion possible than the sign "Safe since 9-11"? Or another that read "There or HERE"?

Well, just about as much as the self-serving illusion that another XX thousand people marching with signs and hearing harangues and going home will do one single thing to change the course of this war or alter our precipitate descent into fascism and planetary destruction.

Here is what I think needs to be done: We need to take care of this ourselves. No Congress, no newspaper, no court, no silver tongued candidate, no messiah. No logos, no "organizations."

We need to mobilize, we the people of the country, one body and one conscience and one will at a time.

And we need to walk – starting from wherever we are – to Washington DC. And walk into Washington DC, and to the White House, and Congress, and the Pentagon and all along K street – and fill the streets with our bodies, and lie down and not allow another minute of this bloody business as usual.

We need to take Gandhi's march to the sea (<http://century.guardian.co.uk/>

1930-1939/Story/0,,128140,00.html) as our model.

Every day, we walk, and we gather others, and day after day we gather more and more – and the media cannot ignore us, and people along the way will take us in, and feed us and join us. I nominate and have tried to ask Cindy Sheehan to lead the walk. She would be ideal, but we don't need her. We need you and me, and our kids and friends.

And we need to start now.

The weather is getting warm. If we leave California in April, we can get to

DC in three months or so, maybe even by July 4.

What do you say? How about we all take a walk? I'll tell ya what. If you will join me, I will stop everything I am doing – everything – and do only this.

Will you ?

CT

David Rubinson retired from a long life in the record business producing a wide variety of artists and film music.

He lives in California and Jamaica W.I. and produces the Negril and Kingston Free Film Festival.

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AUSTRALIA: THE 51st STATE

BY JOHN PILGER

Run via satellite from Australia and Hawaii, Operation Talisman Sabre 2007 is warfare by remote control, designed for "pre-emptive" attacks on other countries

In June this year, 26,000 US and Australian troops will take part in bombarding the ancient fragile landscape of Australia. They will storm the Great Barrier Reef, gun down "terrorists" and fire laser-guided missiles at some of the most pristine wilderness on earth. Stealth, B-1 and B-52 bombers (the latter alone each carry 30 tonnes of bombs) will finish the job, along with a naval onslaught. Underwater depth charges will explode where endangered species of turtle breed. Nuclear submarines will discharge their high-level sonar, which destroy the hearing of seals and other marine mammals.

Run via satellite from Australia and Hawaii, Operation Talisman Sabre 2007 is warfare by remote control, designed for "pre-emptive" attacks on other countries. Australians know little about this. The Australian parliament has not debated it; the media is not interested. The result of a secret treaty signed by John Howard's government with the Bush administration in 2004, it includes the establishment of a vast, new mili-

tary base in Western Australia, which will bring the total of known US bases around the world to 738. No matter the setback in Iraq, the US military empire and its ambitions are growing.

Australia is important because of a remarkable degree of servility that Howard has taken beyond even that of Tony Blair. Once described in the Sydney Bulletin as Bush's "deputy sheriff", Howard did not demur when Bush, on hearing this, promoted him to "sheriff for south-east Asia".

With Washington's approval, he has sent Australian troops and federal police to intervene in the Pacific island nations; in 2006, he effected "regime change" in East Timor, whose prime minister, Mari Alkatiri, had the nerve to demand a proper share of his country's oil and gas resources. Indonesia's repression in West Papua, where American mining interests are described as "a great prize", is endorsed by Howard.

This sub-imperial role has a history. When the six Australian states federated as a nation in 1901, "a Commonwealth . . . independent and proud",

said the headlines, the Australian colonists made clear that independence was the last thing they wanted. They wanted Mother England to be more protective of her most distant colony which, they pleaded, was threatened by a host of demons, not least the "Asiatic hordes" who would fall down on them as if by the force of gravity. "The whole performance," wrote the historian Manning Clark, "stank in the nostrils. Australians had once again grovelled before the English. There were Fatman politicians who hungered for a foreign title just as their wives hungered after a smile of recognition from the Governor-General's wife, who was said to be a most accomplished snubber."

Power hunger

Australia's modern political class has the same hunger for the recognition of great power. In the 1950s, prime minister Robert Menzies allowed Britain to explode nuclear bombs in Australia, sending clouds of radioactive material across populated areas. Australians were told only the good news of being chosen for this privilege. A Royal Air Force officer was threatened with prosecution after he revealed that 400 to 500 Aborigines were in the target zones. "Occasionally we would bring them in for decontamination," he said. "Other times, we just shooed them off like rabbits." Blindness and unexplained deaths followed. After 17 years in power, Menzies was knighted by the Queen and made Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.

An undeclared maxim of Australian politics is that prime ministers become

"statesmen" only when they serve imperial interests. (Honourable exceptions have been dealt with by smear and subversion). In the 1960s, Menzies connived to be "asked" to send Australian troops to fight for the Americans in Vietnam. Red China was coming, he said. Howard is more extreme; in his decade of power, he has eroded the very basis of Australia's social democratic institutions and cast his country as the model of a Washington-style democracy, where the only popular participation is that of voting every few years for two "opposing" parties which share almost identical economic, foreign and "cultural" policies.

For "cultural", read race, which has always been important in creating an insidious state of fear and compliance. In 2001, Howard was re-elected after manipulating the "children overboard affair", in which his senior advisers claimed that Afghan refugees had callously thrown their children into the sea in order to be rescued by an Australian naval vessel. They produced photographs that were proven false, but only after Howard had touched every xenophobic nerve in the white electorate and was duly re-elected. The two officials who brought the "crisis" to its fraudulent fever pitch were promoted after one of them admitted that the deception had "helped" the prime minister.

In a more scandalous case, Howard claimed his defence department had been unaware of another leaking, stricken boat filled with Iraqi and Afghan refugees heading for Australia until after it had sunk. An admiral later

A Royal Air Force officer was threatened with prosecution after he revealed that 400 to 500 Aborigines were in the target zones. "Occasionally we would bring them in for decontamination," he said. "Other times, we just shooed them off like rabbits"

Rupert Murdoch's influence has been critical, far more so than in Britain. Whenever Howard or one of his more oafish ministers want to bend an institution or smear an opponent, they carry out the task in alliance with a pack of rabid mostly Murdoch commentators

revealed this, too, was false; 353 people were allowed to drown, including 146 children.

Above all, it is the control of dissent that has changed Australia. Rupert Murdoch's influence has been critical, far more so than in Britain. Whenever Howard or one of his more oafish ministers want to bend an institution or smear an opponent, they carry out the task in alliance with a pack of rabid mostly Murdoch commentators. As Stuart MacIntyre describes in a new book, *Silencing Dissent*, the Melbourne Herald-Sun columnist, Andrew Bolt, conducted a campaign of ridicule against the independent Australian Research Council which, he claimed, had fallen into the hands of a "a club of scratch-my-back-leftists" whose work was "hostile to our culture, history and institutions", as well as "peek-in-your-pants researchers fixated on gender and race". The then minister of education, Brendan Nelson, vetoed one project grant after another without explanation.

The National Museum of Australia, the national child benefits centre, Aboriginal policy bodies and other independent institutions have been subjected to similar intimidation. A friend who holds a senior university post told me: "You dare not speak out. You dare not oppose the government or 'the big end of town' [corporate Australia]."

As embarrassing corporate crime rises, the treasurer, Peter Costello, has blithely announced a ban on moral or ethical boycotts of certain products. There was no debate; the media was simply told. One of Costello's senior ad-

visers, David Gazard, recently distinguished an American-run seminar in Melbourne, organised by the Public Relations Institute of Australia, at which those paying A\$595 were taught the tricks of conflating activism with "terrorism" and "security threat". Suggestions included: "Call them suicide bombers . . . make them all look like terrorists . . . tree-hugging, dope-smoking, bloody university graduate, anti-progress . . ." They were advised on how to set up bogus community groups and falsify statistics.

Murdoch poison

Schoolteachers who do not fly the flag or music concert organisers who discourage the attendance of racist thugs wrapped in the flag are at risk of a dose of Murdoch poison. Equally, if you reveal the shame of Australia's vassal role you are deemed "anti-Australian" and, without irony, "anti-American". Few Australians are aware that Murdoch, who dominates the press, abandoned his own Australian citizenship so that he could set up the Fox TV network in the US. The University of Sydney is to open a United States Study Centre, backed by Murdoch after he complained about the inability of Australians to appreciate the benefits of the bloodbath in Iraq.

Having recently spoken at overflowing public meetings in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, I am left in no doubt that many are deeply worried that freedoms in their sunny idyll are slipping away. They were given a vivid reminder of this the other day when Vice President Dick Cheney came to Sydney to

“thank” Howard for his support. The New South Wales state government rushed through a law that allowed Cheney’s 70 secret service guards to carry live weapons. With the police, they took over the centre of Sydney and closed the Harbour Bridge and much of the historic Rocks area. Seventeen-vehicle motorcades swept theatrically here and there, as if Howard was boasting to Cheney: “Look at my control over this society; look at my compliant country.”

And yet his guest and mentor is a man who, having refused to fight in Vietnam, has brought back torture and lied incessantly about Iraq, who has made millions in stock options as his Halliburton company profits from the carnage and who has vetoed peace

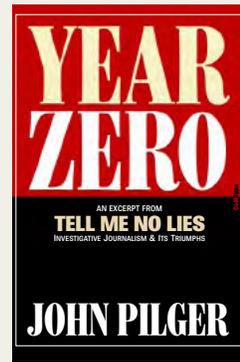
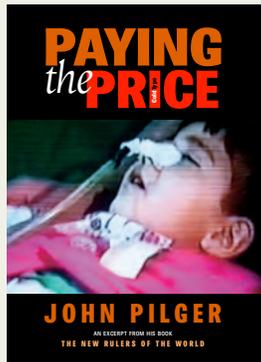
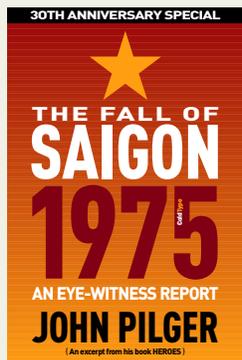
with Iran. Almost every speech he gives includes a threat.

By any measure of international law, Cheney is a major war criminal, yet it was left to a small, brave group of protesters to uphold the Aussie myth of principled rebellion and stand up to the police.

The opposition Labor Party leader, Kevin Rudd, the embodiment of compliance, called them “violent ferals”; one of the protesters was 70 years old. The next day, the headline in the Sydney Morning Herald read: “Terrorists have ambitions of empire, says Cheney.” The irony was exquisite, if lost. **CT**

The New South Wales state government rushed through a law that allowed Cheney’s 70 secret service guards to carry live weapons

John Pilger’s latest book is Freedom Next Time (Bantam Press)



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A PLAGUE OF LAWYERS

BY GEORGE MONBIOT

The company intends to empty the lake, line it with clay and pour in at least 60,000 tonnes of grey slurry – the fly ash mixed with water – then wait for years until it solidifies before attempting “remediation”

If any of you doubts that protest is being criminalised in the United Kingdom, take a look at the injunction posted at www.epuk.org. Granted in the High Court by the Honourable Mr Justice Calvert-Smith, it forbids the people of a village in Oxfordshire from “coming to, remaining on, trespassing or conducting any demonstrations or protesting or other activities” on the claimant’s land⁽¹⁾.

As this land is also the villagers’ most treasured local amenity, it means they have to abandon any effective means of trying to protect their quality of life. If not, they could end up with five years behind bars.

On second thoughts, don’t look at the injunction – it will turn you to stone. A cunning clause ensures that it also applies “to any other person who has been given notice of the terms of this order”. In fact you have probably already been enjoined by reading the first paragraph of this article. So if you value your liberty, you can’t now go near Thrupp Lake.

The lake is the haunt of kingfishers,

otters and even rarer wildlife, such as Cetti’s warblers and water rails⁽²⁾. It is the place where local people walk their dogs, swim, fish and picnic. But for the giant energy company RWE npower, which runs Didcot power station, it is the next dump for its pulverised fly ash, a by-product of burning coal. The company intends to empty the lake, line it with clay and pour in at least 60,000 tonnes of grey slurry – the fly ash mixed with water – then wait for years until it solidifies before attempting “remediation”. Fly ash typically contains lead, mercury, arsenic and cadmium⁽³⁾.

The project, in other words, is an abomination. The people of Radley village, as anyone would, have tried to stop this dumping. They have marched and demonstrated and photographed the cutting down of trees and the destruction of habitats. They have been confronted by one of the most brutal instruments on the statute book.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 is, on the face of it, a sensible piece of legislation defending people from stalkers. But when it was drafted, sev-

eral of us warned that it failed to distinguish between genuine harassment and legitimate protest. Harassment includes “alarming the person or causing the person distress”, which could mean almost anything: you can alarm someone, for example, by telling them that pulverised fly ash contains mercury. It requires a “course of conduct” to be pursued, but this means nothing more than doing something twice⁽⁴⁾. If you take two pictures of workers felling trees, that counts. Conduct includes speech.

Worse still, it was the first of several “behaviour acts” which blur the distinction between civil and criminal offences. The victim of the course of conduct may take a civil claim to the High Court. On the basis of far less evidence than a criminal case requires the court can grant an injunction against the defendant. If the defendant then breaks that injunction – by continuing to talk to the people he is seeking to dissuade, or to march or picket or protest – he then commits a criminal offence, carrying up to five years’ imprisonment.

We warned that it had the makings of a new sedition law. No one took us seriously. But the first three people to be arrested under the act were peaceful protesters⁽⁵⁾. Since then it has been used repeatedly to stifle legitimate dissent.

The injunction was granted on the grounds that the site’s security guards were feeling threatened by the protesters. Many of the guards are former members of the armed forces. In the photos I have seen they wear black face masks. They allege that protesters have spoken threateningly to them and pho-

tographed them⁽⁶⁾. I don’t know whether or not this is true, but the guards claim this has made them feel “scared” and “intimidated” for themselves or their families. It seems to me that the security company has hired a bunch of right cissies. But all the act requires is a judgement that the men felt “alarmed” or distressed”.

So an instrument designed to prevent intimidation in turn intimidates. As well as being forbidden to step onto the land they have walked and played on for years, the villagers and other protesters are forbidden to loiter “within 5 yards of any of the protected persons (whether on foot or in vehicles) in the vicinity of Radley Lakes”⁽⁷⁾. In other words, if one of the security guards approaches them, they must step well back if they want to avoid the possibility of five years inside. The injunction has thrown a great bucket of cold water over their attempts to protect the neighbourhood.

At first I thought these uses were an accidental product of bad drafting. Now I am not so sure. The law company serving the writ, Lawson-Cruttenden, describes itself as “the market leader in obtaining ground breaking injunctions on behalf of individuals and corporations who have been the subject of harassment by direct action protest groups.” It also boasts that it “assisted in the drafting of the ... Protection from Harassment Act 1997”⁽⁸⁾. Are such apparent conflicts of interest normal? Did Lawson-Cruttenden know that the act would support a lucrative line of business? Did Michael Howard, the Home Secretary at the time, know that com-

As well as being forbidden to step onto the land they have walked and played on for years, the villagers and other protesters are forbidden to loiter “within 5 yards of any of the protected persons

DANGEROUS LAWS

Lawyers have an instinctive love of new laws, as this is how they derive their power over the rest of us. In this respect Tony Blair differs not a jot from Margaret Thatcher, Michael Howard, Jack Straw and the other barrister-legislator

panies like this would use the law like a new riot act?

The journalist Henry Porter, who has done more than anyone else to draw attention to some of our illiberal new laws, believes that they result from Tony Blair's "authoritarian streak" and his attempts to build a "fussy, hairsplitting, second-guessing, politically correct state"⁽⁹⁾. On this matter I think he is wrong.

Some of the most illiberal laws of recent years – the 1986 Public Order Act, the 1992 Trade Union Act, the 1994 Criminal Justice Act, the 1996 Security Service Act, the 1997 Police Act and the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act – were drafted by the Conservatives. Blair has supplemented them with all manner of pernicious instruments (such as the 2000 Terrorism Act, the 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, the 2001 Criminal Justice and Police Act, the 2003 Anti-Social Behaviour Act, the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act and the 2005 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act). But this illiberal trend long pre-dates him.

I think it arose partly in line with rising inequality, and the ever more urgent demands by corporations and the super-rich that their assets and their position be defended. But it also reflects something else, seldom discussed by the press: the over-representation of lawyers in British politics. Lawyers have an instinctive love of new laws, as this is how they derive their power over the rest of us. In this respect Tony Blair differs not a jot from Margaret Thatcher, Michael Howard, Jack Straw

and the other barrister-legislators. When you elect lawyers, you get laws.

I have met quite a few lawyers – not always voluntarily – and some of them are able to perform a passable impression of human beings. Like teenagers, they are generally quite harmless by themselves. But sensible voters would ensure that they were never let loose in a representative chamber. People of the same trade seldom meet together but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public. Lawyers are no exception. **CT**

NOTES

1. <http://www.epuk.org/News/475/the-npower-injunction-in-full>
2. http://www.radleyvillage.org.uk/our-village/natural_history/thrupp_lakes.htm
3. See Save Radley Lakes, 2007. Why are we so concerned? <http://www.saveradleylakes.org.uk/Background%20info/CONCERNS.htm>
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5. SchNEWS, 20th March 1998. Issue 159. <http://www.schnews.org.uk/>
6. Eg Witness statements A, C, D, E, F & G (appended).
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9. Henry Porter, 29th June 2006. Blair laid bare: the article that may get you arrested. The Observer.

George Monbiot's latest book is Heat (Doubleday Canada)

WHAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE COLD WAR

BY WILLIAM BLUM

Flash! This just in! The Cold War was not a struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union.

It was a struggle between the United States and the Third World. What there was, was people all over the Third World fighting for economic and political changes against US-supported repressive regimes, or setting up their own progressive governments.

These acts of self-determination didn't coincide with the needs of the American power elite, and so the United States moved to crush those governments and movements even though the Soviet Union was playing virtually no role at all in these scenarios. (It is remarkable the number of people who make fun of conspiracy theories but who accepted without question the existence of an International Communist Conspiracy.)

Washington officials of course couldn't say that they were intervening to block economic or political change, so they called it "fighting communism", fighting a communist conspiracy, fight-

ing for freedom and democracy.

I'm reminded of all this because of a recent article in the Washington Post about El Salvador. It concerned two men who had been on opposite sides in the civil war of 1980-1992. One was José Salgado, who had been a government soldier, and is now the mayor of San Miguel, El Salvador's second-largest city.

Salgado enthusiastically embraced the scorched-earth tactics of his army bosses, the Post reports, even massacres of children, the elderly, the sick – entire villages. It was all in the name of beating back communism, Salgado says he remembers being told. But he's now haunted by doubts about what he saw, what he did, and even why he fought. A US-backed war that was defined at the time as a battle against communism is now seen by former government soldiers and former guerrillas as less a conflict about ideology and more a battle over poverty and basic human rights.

"We soldiers were tricked," says Salgado. "They told us the threat was

A US-backed war that was defined at the time as a battle against communism is now seen by former government soldiers and former guerrillas as less a conflict about ideology and more a battle over poverty and basic human rights

A civil war still rages in Colombia. Government soldiers and large numbers of right-wing paramilitary forces, with indispensable and endless military support from the United States, battle "communism", year after year, decade after decade

communism. But I look back and realize those weren't communists out there that we were fighting – we were just poor country people killing poor country people.”

Salgado says he once thought that the guerrillas dreamed of communism, but now that those same men are his colleagues in business and politics, he is learning that they wanted what he wanted: prosperity, a chance to move up in the world, freedom from repression.

All of which makes what they see around them today even more heartbreaking and frustrating. For all their sacrifices, El Salvador is still among the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere – more than 40 percent of Salvadorans live on less than \$2 a day, according to the United Nations. The country is still racked by violence, still scarred by corruption. For some the question remains: Was it all worth it?

“We gave our blood, we killed our friends and, in the end, things are still bad,” says Salgado. “Look at all this poverty, and look how the wealth is concentrated in just a few hands.”

The guerrillas Salgado once fought live with the same doubts. Former guerrilla Benito Argueta laments that the future didn't turn out as he'd hoped.

Even though some factions of the coalition of guerrilla armies that fought in the civil war were Marxist, he said, ideology had nothing to do with his decision to take up arms and leave the farm where his father earned only a few colones for backbreaking work. Nor did ideology play a role in motivat-

ing his friends in the People's Revolutionary Army. He remembers fighting “for a piece of land, for the chance that my children might someday get to go to the university.”⁽¹⁾

The Salvadoran government could never have waged the war as destructively and for as long as it did without a massive influx of military aid and training from Washington – estimated value: six billion dollars; 75,000 Salvadorans dead; about 20 Americans killed or wounded in combat; dissidents today still have to fear right-wing death squads; scarcely any significant social change in El Salvador; the poor remain as ever; a small class of the wealthy still own the country. But never mind. “Communism” was defeated, and El Salvador remains a loyal member of the empire, sending troops to Iraq.⁽²⁾

This is not merely of historical interest. A civil war still rages in Colombia. Government soldiers and large numbers of right-wing paramilitary forces, with indispensable and endless military support from the United States, battle “communism”, year after year, decade after decade.

The casualties long ago exceeded El Salvador. The irony is monumental, for of those labeled “communist”, a handful of the older ones may have fancied themselves as heirs to Che Guevara 10 or 20 or 30 years ago, but for a long time now the primary motivation of these “left-wing” paramilitary forces has been profits from drugs and kidnappings, obtaining revenge for their comrades' deaths, and staying alive and avoiding capture.

Someday the survivors on both sides may well be expressing sentiments and regrets similar to the Salvadorans above, wondering what the hell it was all really about, or at least wondering what the United States's obsessive interest in their country was. (For those who may have forgotten, it should be noted that the Soviet Union has not existed since 1991.)

And someday, as well, survivors on all sides of Washington's "War on Terrorism", may wonder who the real terrorists were.

The Germans have to learn to kill

In the September 5, 2005 edition of this report I wrote about the decades-long effort by the United States to wean Japan away from its post-WW2 pacifist constitution and foreign policy and set it back on the righteous path to again being a military power, acting in coordination with US foreign policy needs.

For some years, the United States has of course had the same goal in mind for its other major WW2 foe. But recent circumstances indicate that Washington may be losing patience with the rate of Germany's submission to the empire's embrace. Germany declined to send troops to Iraq and sent only non-combat forces to Afghanistan, not quite good enough for the Pentagon war lovers and their NATO allies. Germany's leading news magazine, Der Spiegel, recently reported the following:

At a meeting in Washington, Bush administration officials, speaking in the context of Afghanistan, berated Karsten Voigt, German government repre-

sentative for German-American relations: "You concentrate on rebuilding and peacekeeping, but the unpleasant things you leave to us." ... "The Germans have to learn to kill."

A German officer at NATO headquarters was told by a British officer: "Every weekend we send home two metal coffins, while you Germans distribute crayons and woollen blankets."

A NATO colleague from Canada remarked that it was about time that "the Germans left their sleeping quarters and learned how to kill the Taliban."

Bruce George, the head of the British Defence Committee, said "some drink tea and beer and others risk their lives."

And in Quebec, a Canadian official told a German official: "We have the dead, you drink beer."⁽³⁾

Yet, in many other contexts since the end of the war the Germans have been unable to disassociate themselves from the image of Nazi murderers and monsters.

Will there come the day when the Taliban and Iraqi insurgents will be mocked by "the Free World" for living in peace?

Should it be legal under international law to criticize the state of Israel?

"On Faith", an Internet feature of the Washington Post and Newsweek magazine, poses questions each week to a panel of more than 50 persons from the world of religion. A recent question was "Can you be critical of Israel and not be anti-Semitic?"

Jonathan Sarna, professor of Ameri-

Someday, as well, survivors on all sides of Washington's "War on Terrorism", may wonder who the real terrorists were

Can those in Palestine and Lebanon, upon whose heads and homes Israeli bombs fall, be worthy critics of Israeli policies? Are they not speaking "directly, sadly, and always in pain"?

can Jewish history at Brandeis University replied: "Much depends on the motives of the critic. The unworthy critics today are easy to find. ... their shrill voices are neither moderated by love nor tinged with sadness. Their desire is to see the Jewish state destroyed. The worthy critics, by contrast, are more scarce. ... their words mingle praise along with reproof. They speak directly, sadly, and always in pain."⁽⁴⁾

So there you have it. A question so ridiculous on its face that it should not even be raised by two media giants or anyone else with any intellectual pretensions, but is being raised because of the unrelenting pressure of the Israeli lobby in the United States and throughout the world. It then receives an appropriately ridiculous answer.

Can anyone express reservations about a papal decree and not be anti-Catholic? Can anyone be critical of the pilgrimages to Mecca, which often end in tragedy, and not be anti-Islam? Can anyone be critical of the African negligence on the AIDS crisis and not be racist?

For anyone in the world to criticize the US war in Iraq do they have to love the United States? To be taken seriously – to be judged a "worthy critic" – must they in the same breath offer some kind of praise for the US? Are we to judge that those who don't do so desire to see the American state destroyed? Can those in Palestine and Lebanon, upon whose heads and homes Israeli bombs fall, be worthy critics of Israeli policies? Are they not speaking "directly, sadly, and always in pain"?

40th anniversary of the March on the Pentagon, coming up March 17; an excerpt from William Blum's memoir

October 21, 1967, the March on the Pentagon, surely one of the most extraordinary and imposing acts of protest and civil disobedience in history – the government hunkered down in its trenches in the face of an audacious assault upon its seat of power by its own citizens; a demonstration much bigger than the Bonus Marchers of 1932 (those depression-stricken World War One veterans demanding payment on their government bonus certificates NOW, not in some pie-in-the-sky future – the people peaceably assembled to petition the government for a redress of grievances, violently and humiliatingly squashed by federal troops under the command of a general named MacArthur, and his aide named Eisenhower, and their officer named Patton.)

After a stirring concert at the Reflecting Pool by Phil Ochs surrounded by 150,000 of his closest friends, most of the protestors marched over the Memorial Bridge to the war factory. Never to be forgotten: the roof of the Pentagon when the colossus first came into view and we marched closer and closer – soldiers standing guard, spaced across the roof from one side to the other, weapons at the ready, motionless, looking down upon us from on high with all the majesty of stone warriors or gods atop a classical Greek temple. For the first time that day I wondered – not without excitement – what I was letting myself in for.

This was wholly unlike my first protest at the Pentagon. This was not a group of Quaker pacifists sworn to non-violence, who could bring out the least macho side of even professional military men, and who would be received cordially in the Pentagon cafeteria. Today, we were as welcome and as safe as narcs at a biker rally. Our numbers included many the boys at the Pentagon must have been itching to get their hands on, like those in the Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front, with their Vietcong flags, and SDS, and other “anti-imperialist” groups, who became involved in some of the earliest confrontations that day.

In sharp contrast to the likes of these were the illuminati like Norman Mailer, Marcus Raskin, Noam Chomsky, Robert Lowell, Dwight McDonald – men in dark suits, white shirts and ties as if to ward off evil spirits with the cross of respectability.

In the vast parking lot to which we were confined, open hostility was kept in check at first, but it was clear that the peace was only an inch deep. Repeated draft-card burnings took place – a veritable performance, with flaming cards held high and flaunted square in the irises of the soldiers, whose faces were masked in studied indifference. Although this augured conflict of unpredictable dimensions, I found it exhilarating to see all those young people acting so principled and fearless. I was sorry that I was too old to have a card to burn.

Scattered pockets of mild confrontation broke out, soon unfolding into more widespread and serious clashes.

At one spot a Vietnam teach-in for the troops was broken up by MPs with clubs.

Later, 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers, veterans of Vietnam, entered the scene, bayonets fixed, face to face at last with these people they had been hearing about so much, the privileged little sons of bitches whose incessant crying about international law and morality and god-knows-what-else gave aid and comfort to the enemy, the cowardly little snotnosed draft-dodgers who wallowed in sex and dope while the GIs wallowed in mud and death (and dope as well).

The paratroopers proceeded to kick ass – after ‘Nam this was a church picnic – and many bruised and battered demonstrators were carried away to waiting prison busses, helping to swell the day’s total arrestees to near 700. The protestors, whose only defense was to lock arms, appealed to the soldiers to back off, to join them, to just act human, shouting through a bull horn: “The soldiers are not our enemy, the decision makers are.” Though this was a sincere declaration, its failure to sway their attackers gave way to angry, impotent curses of “bastards” and “motherfuckers”.

I had no big argument with the idea that the soldiers’ bosses were the real enemy, but I had real difficulty with the expressions of “love” for the GIs that some silly hippie types allowed to pass their lips. The soldiers, after all, had made decisions, just as others of their generation had opted for draft evasion or Canada. These soldiers, in particular, were fresh from the killing fields. The

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My favorite one is that "marijuana use leads to heroin". How do they know? Well, 95%, or 97%, of all heroin users first used marijuana. That's how they know. Of course, 100% of all heroin users first used milk. Therefore, drinking milk leads to heroin?

idea of "individual responsibility" is not just a conservative buzzword.

Several eyewitnesses told the Washington Free Press that in other areas of the "battlefield" they saw as many as three soldiers drop their weapons and helmets and join the crowd, and that at least one of them was seized and dragged into the Pentagon by MPs soon afterward. Later attempts to obtain information about these soldiers from the Pentagon were met with denials.⁽⁵⁾

There's no evidence like no evidence

"AIDS patients suffering from debilitating nerve pain got as much or more relief by smoking marijuana as they would typically get from prescription drugs – and with fewer side effects – according to a study conducted under rigorously controlled conditions with government-grown pot."⁽⁶⁾

So, yet another study illustrating the absurdity of marijuana use being illegal in the United States. It remains to be seen whether the anti-marijuana forces will even bother to respond with one of their fatuous arguments. My favorite one is that "marijuana use leads to heroin". How do they know? Well, 95%, or 97%, of all heroin users first used marijuana. That's how they know. Of course, 100% of all heroin users first used milk. Therefore, drinking milk leads to heroin?

The sins of omission are more insidious than the sins of commission

Diane Rehm has a large and loyal lis-

tenership on National Public Radio, and I think she does a pretty good job with her very wide-ranging interviews, but the woman has one deep-seated flaw: She doesn't understand ideology very well – right from left, conservative from liberal, liberal from radical leftist, and so on.

Time and time again she gathers a group to discuss some very controversial issue, and there is not amongst their number a single person of genuine leftist credentials, or even close to it; and from a number of remarks I've heard her make, my guess is that this is not because she has a conservative bias, but rather that she has an inadequate comprehension of what distinguishes left from right; although whoever helps her choosing guests may well be conscious of what they're doing.

The program of February 27, with someone sitting in for Rehm, is a case in point. The topic was Iran – all the controversial issues surrounding that country were on the table. The discussants were: 1) someone from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the oldest, most traditional private institution in support of US imperialism; 2) someone from the American Enterprise Institute, which makes the CFR look positively progressive; 3) someone from the Brookings Institution, which is about on a par with CFR ideologically. The Brookings representative was Kenneth Pollack, former CIA analyst and National Security Council staffer, who will always be remembered (or at least should be) for his 2002 book: *The Threatening Storm: The Case for*

Invading Iraq. Can we look forward to his next book, *The Case for Global Warming*?”

In a society which pays so much lip service to dissent, free speech, and Town Hall “balanced” discussions, the lineup of Diane Rehm’s guests is depressingly typical in the mainstream world. Whether it’s the 9-11 Commission, the Iraq Study Group, the Congressional JFK assassination committee, or any of dozens of other congressional investigating committees over the years, the questioning, challenging, progressive point of view is almost always one that cannot be entertained in polite society.

Is capitalism past its sell-by date?

The prisoner at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, standing on a box, a pointed black hood over his face, his arms outstretched, electrical wires dangling from his fingers, leading to other parts of his cloaked body ... a symbol, an iconic image of the US war against the people of Iraq.

Now we have, if a photo were available, what could be an iconic image of the US war against the people of America, or at least against their health care – a paraplegic man, no wheelchair or walker, somehow propelling himself along a street in Los Angeles, a broken colostomy bag dangling from his piteous body, clothed in a soiled hospital gown, dragging a bag of his belongings in his clenched teeth ... This human being had been taken by Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center to a homeless mission, which refused to

accept him; the man then hurled himself from the hospital van to the street. Witnesses said that the van driver ignored their cries for help and instead applied makeup and perfume before speeding off.⁽⁷⁾

This is one of several cases in the recent past of “homeless dumping” in Los Angeles. It’s all very understandable, from a bookkeeping point of view. The homeless missions have only so many beds, the hospitals have a budget and the debits and the credits have to balance. It’s what happens when a free market in a free society guarantees access to Coca Cola but not to health care.

CT

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NOTES

- [1] Washington Post , January 29, 2007, p.1
- [2] For further details of the civil war period see William Blum, “Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II”, chapter 54
- [3] Der Spiegel, November 20, 2006, p.24
- [4] Washington Post, February 24, 2007, p.B9
- [5] “West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir”, <http://members.aol.com/bblum6/mem.htm>
- [6] Washington Post, February 13, 2007, p.14
- [7] Los Angeles Times, February 15, 2007

William Blum is the author of Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2; Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir; and Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire

PRINCE HARRY IN BLUNDERLAND

BY FELICITY ARBUTHNOT

"There's no way I'm going to sit on my arse while my boys are fighting."

Surreal. Prince Harry, the Queen's 22-year-old grandson, the late Princess Diana's youngest son and third in line to the throne, is being dispatched to Iraq, with his regiment, the Blues and Royals. To be deployed in Basra, the party loving Prince is reportedly "over the moon" and "thrilled". He has apparently undergone a course in cultural awareness and customs (presumably including kicking down doors at 3 a.m., hurling families from their beds and dragging kids into barracks and beating them up, with the odd bit of torture thrown in.)

"Cornet Wales", is his official army title, equal to a Second Lieutenant (a cornet is also a conical wafer filled with ice cream, which drips copiously unless eaten with speed) said, of his determination to deploy, rather than be grounded at home for safety reasons: "There's no way I'm going to sit on my arse while my boys are fighting." His "boys?" Hope they know their place under their fledgling Sovereign Lord. Professor Michael Clark of London's King's College told the Evening Stan-

dard that the "spare heir" as some cynics shamefully refer to him is "...absolutely officer material ...and not over complicated".

The Prince left Britain's elite Eton College with a 'B' grade in art, which led to his art teacher, Sarah Forsyth, receiving £45,000 in damages, for unfair dismissal from the College, for alleging she had helped with the project. A spokesman for the Prince rejected her claims, detailed *The Scotsman* (14th February 2006.) The man who is to lead his 'boys' through Mesopotamia's complex and often (to western eyes) featureless Basra Province and the myriad alleys and sprawling complexities of ancient Basra City, also gained a 'D' in geography.

Dropped from his final exams was history, which might have been helpful. Iraqis have a long historical memory of British invasions for which they suffered. Basra was first occupied by the British in November 1914. Uprisings followed, culminating in 1920, when Iraq was put under British mandate. (In 1917, British General Stanley Maude

stood in Falluja and said that we come as ‘liberators’ not as ‘invaders.’”)

On 13th August 1921 Britain installed their puppet King, Faisal 1st. (“At last we have crowned our little King”, wrote Gertrude Bell from Baghdad.)

Subsequently the British went on their re-mapping of the region (‘lines in the sand’) and in 1933 Faisal died and was succeeded by his son Ghazi who was assassinated in 1939 – Iraq version. Killed in a car crash, British version. The British were anyway held responsible by the Iraqis.

When World War II broke out, the Iraqi government of Nuri Said sided with Britain (he ended up being dragged through the streets until little remained.)

On the 14th July, 1958 the last vestige of British influence died with the execution of Faisal II, when 200 ‘Free Officers’ overthrew the monarchy. ‘Independence’ from Britain had been declared in 1932, in fact it mirrored Iraq’s fake ‘independence’ of America and Britain now and only died with Faisal II.

“The full period of the British imposed monarchy saw great turbulence in Iraq .. violence and terror’ escalated ... ‘coups, assassinations, public executions, persecution of dissident groups ... uprising, followed uprising..” writes Geoff Simons (*Iraq: from Sumer to Saddam*, Macmillan 1994.) Further, then as now, fundamentalist elements in Iran sought to wield influence, especially in Basra and the southern provinces.

All history repeats uncannily in Iraq. And the same disregard for life and patronisation had been shown for its peo-

ple. “I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilised tribes”, wrote Winston Churchill.

“If the Kurds hadn’t learned by our example to behave themselves in a civilised way, then we had to spank their bottoms. This was done by bombs and guns”, wrote Wing Commander Gale, 30th Squadron, Royal Air Force (courtesy Simons.) The British employed or educated virtually no Iraqis, and when they left, writes SIMONS, the average life expectancy was 26 and illiteracy over 90 percent.

Add recent history’s wickednesses and the more recent 13 year embargo, responsible for at least one and a half million excess deaths (1990-2003) an illegal invasion and subsequent carnage, the lynching of Iraq’s legitimate President and his half brother and this is where the ‘not over complicated’ Prince is to lead his ‘boys’.

Basra has also been war’s front line in recent decades. In the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) the 1991 Gulf war, and now in the Iranian incursions and British and American onslaughts and disregard for the ancient city’s peoples. ‘If there was a war between France and Germany, Basra would be bombed’, is a wry saying in the town. First World War poet Siegfried Sassoon’s family came from Basra :

*“You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you’ll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go”.*
(Suicide in the Trenches)

All history repeats uncannily in Iraq. And the same disregard for life and patronisation had been shown for its people

A ROYAL PAIN

Only the naive would think that the capture, or worse, of the Prince would not be the ultimate payback time for numerous British historical injustices in Iraq, ancient and recent

Sinbad left for his magical journeys from this haunting city, which, with the region, produces nearly 600 different kinds of dates, revered as near sacred, as Palestine's olives. The British arrived in Basra in 2003 flying the St George flag – the Crusaders' flag – on their vehicles. When lack of water, due to bombing, became a death threatening crisis for the population, donated water aid was brought in on the British Naval vessel 'Sir Lancelot'. It seemingly turned in to a nice little earner.

Her Majesty's Navy was reportedly so nervous of the traumatised, hungry, dehydrated population, rather than give it out themselves, they gave it to locals with tankers to sell to the penniless. Any old tanker, no matter what had been in it. Legend has it that Sir Lancelot was stolen as a baby and brought up by a water fairy. Those crusaders sure have a sense of humour.

If Prince Harry wishes to gauge the level of appreciation for the the illegal British presence in Basra and Basra Province, he would do well to take his 'boys' on a detour to Basra's cemetery, containing the British War Graves. Cemeteries of former British invaders, throughout Iraq, have been tended by generations of Iraqis, as if their own lay there, the oldest, for 100 years. At death, God takes over responsibility for injustice and He judges. A final resting place must be respected by the living. On the invasion, British war graves were immediately vandalised and wrecked – including that of General Maude, in Baghdad.

That, though is the fate of the dead. Britain has joined America in crusad-

ing, invading, slaughtering, lynching the legitimate President of Iraq. Prince Harry and his 'boys' are now to illegally squat in Palaces or other State buildings. A war crime.

He will also be part of the Nuremberg Tribunal's ruling of the 'supreme crime': a war of aggression. It has to be wondered what Her Majesty must think. Only the naive would think that the capture, or worse, of the Prince would not be the ultimate payback time for numerous British historical injustices in Iraq, ancient and recent. Further, the Prince cannot even go to a night club in London's exclusive Mayfair (and fall out of the door at 3 a.m.) without a personal protection squad. As he becomes, inevitably, the ultimate magnet for the resistance, it is reported an SAS unit has been training to follow/protect/rescue him. What of the prize his 'boys' too, will become, by his presence? The logic of his deployment equals the recent revelation that the Ministry of Defence had spent £18,000 in experiments to find whether random U.K., citizens could find Osama bin Laden by clairvoyance. Prince Harry and his men, whether 'patrolling' or palace squatting, will be a prize beyond gold.

Britain's precious Prince, will also be allowed home for a memorial service for his mother and a concert in her honour. Britain's soldiers of a lesser God being able to pop home for poignant family commemorations? Dream on. As the privileged pray and party, the 'boys' will doubtless patrol alone, even, Heaven forbid, maybe pay the Cornet's price. "When the war is done and

youth stone dead (and old men) toddle home and die in bed”, wrote Basra’s son, Sassoon, of war planners.

Prime Minister Blair said recently he was ‘proud’ of his war. The Independent’s Political Sketch writer, Simon Carr, wrote in concern of the Dear Leader: ‘... crossing the fine line between insanity and lunacy’.

When Prince Harry’s mother, Princess Diana died, Blair at his school-boy Shakespearean best, stood with wobbly lip and talked of; “ ...the people’s Princess.” It has to be hoped, that despite all best efforts, the final chapter in this historic folly which defies shame, is not him stumbling into the sunset, for a seat on the giant Carlile Group (founded by the Bush and Bin Laden families) remembered for all time, paying tribute to: “The people’s Prince.”

Diana herself is remembered in a carefully staged walk through a mine-

field. Her son is headed for both a political and actual one. Ironically the Prince’s deployment was announced on 22nd February, a year to the day of the destruction of the Golden Mosque at Samarra. In the Middle East, dates are all. The second day of the second month, was deemed unlucky by Pythagoras and consigned to Pluto. Samarra was 222.

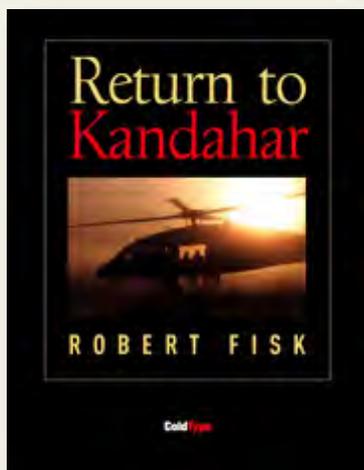
“Cry God, for Harry, England and St.”George’. Shakespeare, Henry V; Act Three.

Will humanity never learn? **CT**

Felicity Arbuthnot is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She has written and broadcast on Iraq, and was also senior researcher for John Pilger’s award-winning documentary, Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq.

The Independent’s Political sketch writer, Simon Carr, wrote in concern of the Dear Leader: ‘... crossing the fine line between insanity and lunacy’

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WHERE'S IRAQ GOING NOW?

BY TONY KARON

The Iraqis are intimately aware of the debate in Washington over withdrawal, and they know that despite the surge of troops, the U.S. will in the near future be forced by domestic pressure to withdraw most of its infantry from Iraqi streets

Four years into the Iraq war – “hard to believe,” eh, Mr Wolfowitz? – don’t expect the U.S. media to dwell on the conceptual foundations of this catastrophe. That may be because the media was rather complicit in laying those foundations. But the more interesting question, today, I think, is where the Iraq adventure is going, because its narratives have clearly unraveled, and its strategic purpose – in the sense of attainable goals rather than fantasies – is now far from clear. To be sure, today, Washington is clear only on what it wants to prevent in Iraq, and even then its chances of doing so are slim. Still, as Bush says, that doesn’t mean it can withdraw.

It’s worth noting, in passing, that the decision making structures in the United States are fundamentally dysfunctional to its imperial project – its system of government is democratic (in a plutocratic sort of way), and distributes its flow of information and decision making across a number of bureaucratic command centers that are seldom on

quite the same page, and compete for authority and resources – a competition that occurs partly in the public eye, via “leaks” to the media, whose source is invariably the bureaucratic rivals of those who are made to look bad by the story. The executive decisionmakers are always vulnerable to the limited appetite of the electorate for costly imperial adventures, and the electorate gets to express its impatience every two years by using the ballot box to limit the authority of those directing the current imperial expedition.

The patience of the enemy out in the field, meanwhile, is invariably far deeper than that allowed by U.S. election cycles. Ho Chi Minh knew that; so do the Iraqi insurgents and the Shiites and the Iranians, and the Palestinians and Syrians and everybody else Washington is fighting. The Iraqis are intimately aware of the debate in Washington over withdrawal, and they know that despite the surge of troops, the U.S. will in the near future be forced by domestic pressure to withdraw most of its infantry from Iraqi streets. (No wonder frustrated hawks

like Max Boot and Michael O'Hanlon are suggesting that the U.S. military begin outsourcing expeditionary warfare to the satrapies, offering green cards for four years service – just as the British wherever possible sent Indians or Gurkhas to do their fighting.) But even that won't overcome the bureaucratic internecine warfare.

Ask a question as simple as "How could the U.S. occupy Iraq without having a coherent plan?" and the answer is simple: There was a plan, but it was trashed because it had been developed in the State Department, whose personnel hadn't drunk the Kool Aid of permanent revolution in the Middle East, and therefore couldn't be trusted. While the neocons might have believed their fantasies about Iraq transforming itself immediately into a willing and happy satrap of the U.S., the likes of Cheney and Rumsfeld had no inclination to back a long occupation. So, Paul Bremer was sent in without a clue, armed with some old manuals from the occupation of Germany in 1945 (no jokes!) and a civil administration recruited largely from the intern echelon of neocon think-tanks (again, no jokes!).

Media failure

Then there's the question of the media's failure to challenge the conceptual frameworks in which the public was prepared for war. I'll resist the hubristic temptation to reprise the predictive highlights of the 487 pieces of analysis I've written for TIME.com over the years on Iraq, but suffice to say that you didn't need to be a clairvoyant to

establish (at the time, not only in retrospect) that the war was based on false premises: Not only the premise that Saddam had some unconventional weapons, but that even if he did, that invading and occupying his country was a wise response. (Think about it, would Iraq be any less of a mess today if the U.S. had actually found a couple of sheds full of mustard gas and even a refrigerator stocked with botulinum toxin?) Nor was it that hard to establish the inevitability that the U.S. occupation of Iraq would stir a nationalist resistance that would be hard to contain – people don't like being occupied; it makes Arab people feel like the Palestinians, and that inspires them to resist. All this was lost on the coterie of "experts" who have dominated the milquetoast media discussion of Iraq even after they've been proved so spectacularly wrong (Kristol, Boot, Krauthammer, Beinart, Hitchens, Packer and so on).

But there's no value in reprising the morbid jig that sent America lurching into this mess.

The more interesting question, I think, is what is Iraq now? What is the U.S. doing there? What are its objectives, and which of them can be salvaged? And the reason those questions are so interesting is that the original bundle of impulses and objectives that took America into war has now completely unraveled in the brutal reality of Iraq. Not only that, the U.S. long ago lost its ability to shape the outcome, and the agendas of others limit what Washington is able to achieve.

Bush sounded almost comical Mon-

Paul Bremer was sent in without a clue, armed with some old manuals from the occupation of Germany in 1945 (no jokes!) and a civil administration recruited largely from the intern echelon of neocon think-tanks (again, no jokes!)

WHAT NEXT?

Funny how those who tell us that "the only language Arabs understand is violence" are those most inclined to converse with the Arab world in that tongue

day when he appealed for patience, saying it would take months to secure Baghdad. Perhaps, but pacification of the capital via a massive injection of new troops, four years into the war, is not much of an achievement – and even then, it will happen relatively quickly because the Shiite militias have simply gone to ground to let the U.S. forces sweep their areas unimpeded, and concentrate on the Sunni insurgents.

The Shiite and Sunni political-military formations will be there months from now, and there's no sign that the current government is able to achieve an accord that would resolve the conflict. Nor is there a credible alternative to the present government – if the best hope is the wannabe-thug Iyad Allawi, suddenly returned from London to try and forge a new coalition, you know Maliki is as good as it gets.

And, of course, some of the things Maliki has to do to stay in power are likely to intensify the conflict – not only his alliance with Sadr, but his dependence on the support of the Kurds, who are pressing to complete their takeover of Kirkuk this year, which the Sunni Arabs and Turkey are unlikely to accept. Breaking up the country will cause regional chaos, holding it together offers simply a more contained chaos.

Still, Bush is not wrong in saying that retreating from Iraq will empower forces hostile to the U.S. all over the region. Of course he omits to acknowledge that it already has, but a withdrawal would certainly underscore the image of epic defeat, and would likely plunge the region into chaos as various regional powers moved to secure their

stake in the resulting vacuum. So, while there's not much that can be achieved, cutting bait could result in greater setbacks.

Iraq, then, may no longer simply be a place or a project; instead it has become the morbid condition of contemporary imperial America.

The decision to invade Iraq is not reducible to any single cause or impulse, as both the Administration hacks (including Christopher Hitchens!) and the conspiracy theorists and vulgar-Marxists would have us believe. Just as political power itself rests in a complex web of relations and balances spread over a range of different institutions with different interests and objectives, so must the decision to go to war be explained as the confluence of a range of different impulses into a kind of "perfect storm."

Language of violence

Even before 9/11 created an easily exploited climate of fear and crude belief among those in power in the necessity of retribution (inspired by the sort of vulgar Orientalism of the Bernard Lewis brigade – funny how those who tell us that "the only language Arabs understand is violence" are those most inclined to converse with the Arab world in that tongue), there were other impulses:

- Iraq was not invaded simply because of its vast oil reserves, and yet there's absolutely no question that winning control over those reserves for Western oil companies was considered a major benefit of going to war – given the broad prescriptions of the Energy Task Force headed up by Cheney two

years earlier, it's simply impossible that the Administration had not factored the oil windfall into its thinking. Saddam was a nuisance in the geopolitical sphere, but once the opportunity presented itself, there was no reason to live with his control over such vast oil reserves.

- Iraq was not invaded simply because of the suspicion that it harbored unconventional weapons. Even if it had the weapons unaccounted for by the UN inspectors, those posed no strategic threat to anyone – indeed, it was the very weakness of the Iraqi regime that made it such an appealing beach-head for the launch of a broad strategy to reorder the politics of the region to the advantage of the U.S. and its allies through the application of U.S. military force.

- Iraq wasn't invaded because of a suspicion that it might be in cahoots with al-Qaeda. That was the flimsiest part of the case; indeed, it's hard to imagine how Colin Powell could keep a straight face making that allegation to the UN Security Council. Al-Qaeda loathed Saddam, and Saddam loathed al-Qaeda. Moreover, neither Saddam nor al-Qaeda represented a significant strategic threat to the U.S. Still, the broad strategy of putting a massive U.S. military presence at the heart of the Arab world was definitely viewed as a means of destroying the emerging challenges to U.S. authority and influence that al-Qaeda was hoping to stir. Partly, this was the crude logic of "retaliation"; partly it was a very specific plan to reorganize the political-military terrain of the region by making Iraq the major

staging area of U.S. military operations throughout the region, building 14 permanent bases there from which U.S. power could be projected in all directions (and taking the pressure of hosting the U.S. off the more fragile regime in Saudi Arabia). And the neocons were already talking about bringing down the regimes of Iran, Syria and even Saudi Arabia, all of whom had actually allied with the U.S. to a greater or lesser extent against al-Qaeda.

- Iraq wasn't invaded to spread "democracy" in the Middle East; indeed, democratic elections weren't even on the agenda as Bremer sought a three-year process to remake the political and economic system under his direct control with no direct elections. It was the pressure from Ayatollah Sistani and the Shiites that forced the U.S. to relent and hold the elections, and once that happened, political control slipped forever out of the hands of the U.S. and the exiles it had cultivated and parachuted in – democracy produced a government closer to Tehran than to Washington. Hobbesian hardmen like Cheney and Rumsfeld would have had little instinctive enthusiasm for the messianic naivete of the likes of Wolfowitz and the neocons, but their priority may have been to limit the exposure of U.S. troops and its duration, (Rummy) and to hasten the transfer of authority to a kleptocratic Quisling class with whom the likes of Halliburton and the oil companies would love to deal. (Too bad democracy involves letting people vote.)

Plainly, much of that vision lies in tatters. The question is how much of it

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WHAT NEXT?

The fact that there's still no sign of an Iraqi air force or any other military capability to defend the country's borders tells you that Washington has made no plans to leave Iraq independent, in the sense of capable of defending its sovereignty, any time soon

can be salvaged, and at what cost – or even more gloomily, how can Iraq be managed in ways that limit the extent to which it weakens and imperils U.S. global interests. (It's no longer plausible to see it as advancing those interests.)

The Baghdad security plan is clearly triage, aggressive defense designed to prevent the capital outside the Green Zone from falling entirely into the hands of insurgents and militias. It's being tied to political conditions set for the Iraqi government, although it's already clear that the government is unlikely to meet many of those – the idea of national reconciliation they envisage may not be plausible for the foreseeable future. Interestingly enough, one of the most urgent “benchmarks” set for the Maliki government is the passing of a new oil law.

Foreign oil companies

The oil law is characterized in most of the U.S. media simply as a mechanism for fairly sharing oil revenues among the various regions and therefore sects and ethnic groups – but the far more significant portion of the legislation is the fact that it offers up ownership of Iraq's reserves to foreign oil companies, meaning that, in fact, the revenues available for sharing will be considerably reduced – but the imperial objective of acquiring control of Iraq's oil reserves will be ensured. Although Maliki's cabinet has accepted the law, it remains to be seen whether the parliament will adopt it. Iraqis are not stupid, and won't that easily sign away their patrimony no matter how good Christopher Hitchens tells them it will

be for them. (Who'd have imagined the Trotskyist contrarian of old not only flakking for the Administration, but also as a shill for Big Oil...)

But whether it's the troop surge or the oil law, what we're seeing now are panicky improvisations. And many questions simply remain unanswered – the Administration has studiously dodged ever stating clearly its intentions, or even desires, apropos the permanent bases it has constructed in Iraq. (But Washington is still pouring billions of dollars into constructing them.) But the fact that there's still no sign of an Iraqi air force or any other military capability to defend the country's borders tells you that Washington has made no plans to leave Iraq independent, in the sense of capable of defending its sovereignty, any time soon. (Even the Hillary Clinton types talk of pulling U.S. forces out of the cities and deploying them on the borders, as if Iraq is to remain a U.S. protectorate in perpetuity.)

But there simply is no U.S. plan constructed in a modular way that allows maximal aims to be jettisoned in order to ensure the realization of core objectives. It simply unravels, messily.

Much of the U.S. coverage of the troop surge is centered on whether or not it will “work,” with Democrats insisting it won't and neocons saying it already has. But that depends, very much, on what we mean by “work.” Obviously it won't defeat the insurgency or the Shiite militias: The commander in charge, General David Petraeus, is a smart counterinsurgency thinker, and he has made clear himself that no action by the U.S. military can

secure Iraq – the critical dimension, he insists, remains political: the ability of a new political order to integrate the Sunnis, and to negotiate compacts with the Shiite leadership to whom the militias answer.

So, when Petraeus is asked, for example, whether the Mehdi army of Moqtada Sadr could have a legitimate role as a community security force protecting Shiites, he is open to the idea even if Washington's political echelon isn't.

It strikes me that Petraeus envisages his mission as a holding operation, to prevent Baghdad from collapsing into anarchy in the hope that freezing the current balance of forces between the sectarian rivals largely in place, the U.S. can create space for a new political compact. While the failed social engineers in Washington may be hoping to remake the political center in Baghdad, their prospects for doing so look increasingly grim. Petraeus is unlikely to be as naive as the political wing of the Administration in imagining that Maliki

can be sidelined or Sadr eliminated.

Instead, he's more likely to encourage discussion with the insurgents, and also the diplomatic process Iraq's government has initiated with its neighbors, forcing Washington into engaging with Iran and Syria (or creating cover for it to do so). If Iran and Saudi Arabia are able to achieve a compact that stabilizes Lebanon, then such regional horse-trading may yet have something to offer in Iraq. The problem, of course, is that both the domestic political process in Iraq, and the regional diplomacy, are beyond Washington's control.

What Iraq is, in short, after four years, is an exercise in damage-limitation. The only certainty now is that the U.S. will emerge from the conflict considerably weaker as a global power than when it went in. "Hard to believe," eh Wolfie, "hard to believe..." **CT**

Tony Karon is a senior editor at TIME.com. Originally published at his personal web site – tonykaron.com

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KANGAROO COURT FINDS FIRST VICTIM

BY AMY GOODMAN

He was subjected to repeated interrogations. He witnessed other prisoners being beaten and terrorized with dogs. He was at times kept in total darkness, at times in continual bright light (he has grown his hair to chest length so he can cover his eyes to allow him to sleep)

It is appropriate that a person from Australia, home of the kangaroo, should be the first one dragged before the kangaroo court at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay. David Hicks, imprisoned there for more than five years, pleaded guilty last month to providing material support for terrorism.

The case of Hicks offers us a glimpse into the Kafkaesque netherworld of detentions, kidnappings, torture and show trials that is now, internationally, the shameful signature of the Bush administration. Hicks' passage through this sham process affords us all an opportunity to demand the closure of Guantanamo and an end to these heinous policies.

Conditions may soon exist to shutter the prison, with George Bush's lame-duck status, the Democratic takeover of Congress, the possible departure of Guantanamo's arch-defender and architect, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, and, if recent reports are true, a desire to close the prison on the part of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

These bogus military commission trials amplify global contempt for the Guantanamo prison.

The Pentagon claims that Hicks was in Afghanistan fighting against the United States, then was apprehended by the Northern Alliance in late 2001 while fleeing to Pakistan. After transfer to U.S. military control, he was moved around various detention facilities and, he says, brutally beaten and sodomized.

By January 2002 he was in Guantanamo. He was subjected to repeated interrogations. He witnessed other prisoners being beaten and terrorized with dogs. He was at times kept in total darkness, at times in continual bright light (he has grown his hair to chest length so he can cover his eyes to allow him to sleep). He had no access to a lawyer for more than a year or knowledge of the charges against him. Others, those lucky enough to have lawyers or to have actually gotten out, tell similar tales of continual cold, of desecration of the Quran and of sexual humiliation

designed specifically to torture Muslim men.

During his five years of detention, people fought for Hicks. His father, Terry Hicks, traveled to the U.S. He donned an orange jumpsuit, like the one his son was forced to wear, and stood in a 6-foot-by-8-foot cage on Broadway in New York while fielding questions from the press.

Even the U.S. Supreme Court, the body that appointed Bush president in 2000, agreed that the prisoners must have some access to habeas corpus, the right to challenge one's imprisonment. This central tenet of Western law, established in the Magna Carta in 1215, has been thrown out the window, along with the Geneva Conventions, by Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Gonzales and others.

Guantanamo has sparked one of the United States' major growth industries: protesting against Guantanamo. From campuses to churches, the anger has driven regular citizens to action. Cindy Sheehan and members of the Catholic Worker Movement went to Cuba and marched overland to Guantanamo to challenge the illegitimate prison and its jailers in person.

Dismissed civilian lawyer

Even in Hicks' brief moment in the controversial "trial," the government did what it could to strip him of the few rights it claims he has.

The presiding military judge, Marine Col. Ralph Kohlmann, dismissed his civilian lawyer, Joshua Dratel, and a

Navy reservist attorney, Rebecca Snyder, who was assisting Hicks' government-appointed attorney. Hicks was stunned, and at first refused to plead. Hours later, after the trial was reconvened, he pleaded guilty to his one remaining charge.

Having no hope for a fair trial, he reportedly believed that pleading guilty would allow him to serve his sentence in Australia – his only hope of escaping Guantanamo.

There are still more than 380 prisoners at Guantanamo. Almost none have been charged. Those ultimately charged with murder could be sentenced to death by the military commission. The decider of the death penalty after appeals are exhausted is none other than George Bush, who as governor of Texas oversaw the most active death chamber in the United States. Back then his lawyer was Alberto Gonzales.

The U.S. attorney scandal is threatening to take down Gonzales. But it is his condoning of torture from Guantanamo to Abu Ghraib that should seal his fate.

The grim Guantanamo experiment is reaching its climax. The house of cards that has been erected to support this immoral, criminal enterprise is poised to collapse. Call, shout, sit down, march, donate, write, protest ... demand that Guantanamo be closed. **CT**

Amy Goodman is the host of Democracy Now!, a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on 500 stations in North America.

Having no hope for a fair trial, he reportedly believed that pleading guilty would allow him to serve his sentence in Australia – his only hope of escaping Guantanamo

BRINKMANSHIP IN THE GULF

BY VETERAN INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS FOR SANITY

At this point, the relative merits of the British and Iranian versions of what actually happened are greatly less important than how hotheads on each side – and particularly the British – decide to exploit the event

The frenzy in America's corporate media over Iran's detainment of 15 British Marines who may, or may not, have violated Iranian-claimed territorial waters is a flashback to the unrestrained support for the administration's war-mongering against Iraq shortly before the war.

The British are refusing to concede the possibility that its Marines may have crossed into ill-charted, Iranian-claimed waters and are ratcheting up the confrontation. At this point, the relative merits of the British and Iranian versions of what actually happened are greatly less important than how hotheads on each side – and particularly the British – decide to exploit the event.

There is real danger that this incident, and the way it plays out, may turn out to be outgoing British Prime Minister Tony Blair's last gesture of fealty to President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and "neo-conservative" advisers who, this time, are looking for a casus belli to "justify" air strikes on Iran. Bush and Cheney no doubt find encouragement in the

fact that the Democrats last week refused to include in the current House bill on Iraq war funding proposed language forbidding the White House from launching war on Iran without explicit congressional approval.

The impression, cultivated by the White House and our domesticated media, that Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-majority states might favor a military strike on Iran is a myth.

But the implications go far beyond the Middle East. With the Russians and Chinese, the US has long since forfeited the ability, exploited with considerable agility in the 70s and 80s, to play one off against the other.

In fact, US policies have helped drive the two giants together. They know well that it's about oil and strategic positioning and will not stand idly by if Washington strikes Iran.

Intelligence analysts place great store in sources' record for reliability and the historical record. We would be forced to classify Tony Blair as a known prevaricator who, for reasons still not entirely clear, has a five-year record of acting as

man's best friend for Bush. If the president needs a casus belli, Blair will probably fetch it.

Is there, then, any British statesman well versed in both the Middle East and maritime matters, who is worthy of trust? There is. Craig Murray is former UK Ambassador to Uzbekistan (until he was cashiered for openly objecting to UK and US support for torture there) and also former head of the maritime section of the British Foreign Office, and has considerable experience negotiating disputes over borders extending into the sea.

In recent days, former ambassador Murray has performed true to character in courageously speaking out, taking public issue with the British government's position on the incident at hand. He was quick to quote, for example, the judiciously balanced words of Commodore Nick Lambert, the Royal Navy commander of the operation on which the Marines were captured: "There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that they were in Iraqi territorial waters. Equally, the Iranians may well claim that they were in their territorial waters. The extent and definition of territorial waters in this part of the world is very complicated."

Compare the commodore's caution with the infallible certainty with which Blair has professed to be "utterly confident" that the Marines were in Iraqi waters, and you get an idea of what may be Blair's ultimate purpose.

Writing in his widely read blog (<http://www.craigmurray.co.uk/weblog.html>), Murray points to a "colossal problem" with respect to the map the

British government has used to show coordinates of the incident and the Iran/Iraq maritime border – the story uncritically accepted by stenographers of the mainstream press.

Murray writes: "The Iran/Iraq maritime boundary shown on the British government map does not exist. It has been drawn up by the British Government. Only Iraq and Iran can agree on their bilateral boundary, and they have never done this in the Gulf, only inside the Shatt because there it is the land border too. This published boundary is a fake with no legal force...Anyway, the UK was plainly wrong to be ultra-provocative in disputed waters..."

"They [the British Marines] would under international law have been allowed to enter Iranian territorial waters if in "hot pursuit" of terrorists, slavers, or pirates....But they were looking for smuggled vehicles attempting to evade car duty. What has the evasion of Iranian or Iraqi taxes got to do with the Royal Navy?"

Ambassador Murray has appealed to reason and cooler heads. To state what should be the obvious, he notes it is not legitimate for the British government to draw a boundary without agreement of the countries involved: "A little more humility, and an acknowledgement that this is a boundary subject to dispute, might actually get our people home. The question is are we really aiming to get our people home, or to maximize propaganda from the incident?"

"What is known at this point regarding the circumstances suggests Royal Navy misfeasance rather than deliber-

Compare the commodore's caution with the infallible certainty with which Blair has professed to be "utterly confident" that the Marines were in Iraqi waters, and you get an idea of what may be Blair's ultimate purpose

DRUMS OF WAR

One side or the other is going to be forced to surrender some of its pride if a more deadly confrontation is going to be averted

ate provocation. The way the UK and US media has been stoked, however, suggests that both London and Washington may decide to represent the intransigence of Iranian hotheads as a *casus belli* for the long prepared air strikes on Iran. And not to be ruled out is the possibility that we are dealing with a provocation *ab initio*. Intelligence analysts look to precedent, and what seems entirely relevant in this connection is the discussion between Bush and Blair on Jan. 31, 2003 six weeks before the attack on Iraq.

The “White House Memo” (like the famous “Downing Street Memo” leaked earlier to the British press) shows George Bush broaching to Blair various options to provoke war with Iraq. The British minutes – the authenticity of which is not disputed by the British government – of the Jan. 31, 2003 meeting stated the first option as: “The US was thinking of flying U2 reconnaissance aircraft with fighter cover over Iraq, painted in UN colours. If Saddam fired on them, he would be in breach.” Not to mention the (in)famous Tonkin Gulf non-incident, used by President Lyndon Johnson to justify bombing North Vietnam.

The increasingly heavy investment of “face” in the UK Marine capture situation is unquestionably adding to the danger of an inadvertent outbreak of open hostilities.

One side or the other is going to be forced to surrender some of its pride if a more deadly confrontation is going to be averted. And there is no indication that the Bush administration is doing anything other than encouraging British

recalcitrance.

Unless one’s basic intention is to provoke a hostile action to which the US and UK could “retaliate,” getting involved in a tit-for-tat contest with the Iranians is a foolish and reckless game, for it may not prove possible to avoid escalation and loss of control. And we seem to be well on our way there. If one calls Iran “evil,” arrests its diplomats, accuses it of promoting terrorism and unlawful capture, one can be certain that the Iranians will retaliate and raise the stakes in the process.

That is how the game of tit-for-tat is played in that part of the world. What British and American officials seem not to be taking into account is that the Iranians are the neighborhood toughs. In that neighborhood, they control the conditions under which the game will be played. They can change the rules freely any time they want; the UK cannot, and neither can Washington. Provocative behavior, then, can be very dangerous, unless you mean to pick a fight you may well regret.

Someone should recount to Tony Blair and Ayatollah Khomeini the maxim quoted by former United Nations chief weapons inspector Hans Blix recently:

*“The noble art of losing face
Will someday save the human race.”* **CT**

The Steering Group of the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) consists of Ray Close, Princeton, NJ, Larry Johnson, Bethesda, MD, David MacMichael, Linden, VA, Ray McGovern, Arlington, VA, and Coleen Rowley, Apple Valley, MN

TWO FACES OF THE WAR ON TERROR

BY BILL VAN AUKEN

Two recent cases prosecuted by the US Justice Department involving charges of providing material aid to a foreign terrorist organization have led to startlingly different results for the defendants.

In the first, the accused was seized by federal agents at a US airport, vilified as a mass murderer by the US attorney general in a nationally broadcast press conference and then held in solitary confinement without charges or the right to see a lawyer or have contact with family members for more than three years. During this period, he underwent sensory deprivation and outright torture that, his lawyers argue, left him mentally damaged and incompetent to stand trial. While federal prosecutors now portray the defendant as merely a low-level courier, working for others, they still want to jail him for life.

In the second instance, the individual defendants have never been named, much less publicly denounced by the attorney general. The sole mention of the ultimate punishment for their crime came in the form of a discreet posting on

the Justice Department web site.

The defendants in this second case are part of a major multinational operation and admit to funneling millions of dollars abroad to finance a murderous terrorist organization. Yet they were allowed to reach a pre-trial plea bargain that included as the penalty a fine amounting to 0.55 percent of their annual revenue. The organization that financed the foreign terrorists has boasted publicly that its global operations have not been affected in the slightest.

What is to account for this apparently gross disparity? The answer is simple. In the first case, the defendant was Jose Padilla, born in Brooklyn and raised in a Chicago ghetto before converting to Islam in prison. In the second, the defendants are multimillionaire executives of a multibillion-dollar US-based transnational corporation with a long history of political influence and a prominent role in US foreign policy – Chiquita Brands International, Inc.

By any objective scale, the crimes to which the corporation pleaded guilty are far more serious than the rather

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Chiquita, on the other hand, acknowledged financing right-wing paramilitary death squads in Colombia to the tune of more than \$1.7 million between 1997 and 2004

vague conspiracy allegations made by the government against the former “enemy combatant” Padilla.

In November 2005, faced with a potential ruling by the US Supreme Court challenging the administration’s claim that it is empowered to detain both US citizens and foreign nationals indefinitely without charges on the sole say-so of the US president that they are “enemy combatants,” the Justice Department criminally indicted Padilla.

Gone were the lurid claims made 3½ years earlier that he was involved in a plot to detonate radioactive “dirty bombs” in US cities. Instead, he was accused of a “conspiracy” involving the raising of funds for Islamic movements in places like Bosnia, Chechnya and Kosovo, with the amounts of money listed ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. No charges whatsoever were presented that Padilla was involved in any terrorist activities in the US itself.

Chiquita, on the other hand, acknowledged financing right-wing paramilitary death squads in Colombia to the tune of more than \$1.7 million between 1997 and 2004. This organization, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (known by its Spanish acronym AUC), has been involved in the massacre, assassination, kidnapping and torture of thousands of Colombians, mostly peasants and workers, as well as trade unionists and left-wing political figures.

On September 10, 2001, a day before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the US State Department formally designated the AUC as a “foreign terrorist organization,” making it illegal in the US to provide it with ma-

terial support. According to the announcement of the plea deal posted on the Justice Department’s web site, Chiquita made more than 100 monthly payments to the AUC through its wholly owned Colombian subsidiary, “Banadex,” which was the corporation’s most profitable division. The payments were arranged following a meeting in 1997 between a senior company executive and the leader of the AUC, Carlos Castaño.

“Chiquita’s payments to the AUC were reviewed and approved by senior executives of the corporation, including high-ranking officers, directors and employees,” the Justice Department reported. The company listed these payments in its records as being for “security services.” Beginning in 2002, it began making direct cash payments to the death squad, in order to better conceal the relationship.

Fully half of these payments – totaling \$825,000 – were made after the US designation of the AUC as a terrorist organization. The Justice Department uncovered records of communications between the corporation and its outside counsel in 2003 in which the lawyers insisted emphatically that Chiquita should immediately halt the payments and unload its Colombian operation in order to avoid prosecution for aiding a terrorist organization. The Chiquita board of directors took the decision to continue the payments, while disclosing the practice to the US Justice Department. The attitude of company officers was expressed to their lawyer as, “Just let them sue us, come after us.”

The Justice Department, according to its own account, took an extraordinarily

lenient approach, describing the practice as “complicated” and only a “technical violation.” Nonetheless, it maintained that the payments were illegal and could not continue.

Chiquita’s management, however, continued to flout the law, paying the right-wing paramilitaries for almost another year, giving them another \$300,000. During that year, the AUC was accused of carrying out 16 massacres, 362 assassinations and 180 kidnappings, all of these crimes financed in part by the US food giant. In June 2004, Chiquita sold its Colombian subsidiary, Banadex, for about \$43.5 million.

Why Chiquita paid the AUC

The company has defended its action by describing the financing of the AUC as “protection payments,” made, in the words of Chiquita chairman and chief executive Fernando Aguirre, out of “our good faith concern for the safety of our employees.”

While apparently the company did make such payments to left-wing guerilla movements, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), before 1997, the relationship between the fruit company and the right-wing paramilitaries was something quite different. In their original meeting in 1997, AUC leader Castaño sought and secured funding from the corporation for a military campaign to drive the FARC out of the regions where Chiquita had its banana operations.

While Chiquita’s executives have been given virtually a free pass by the US Justice Department, prosecutors in Colombia are pursuing a separate inves-

tigation and have indicated that they are preparing to seek the extradition of at least eight Chiquita executives.

In addition to the payments to the AUC, the executives are under investigation in connection with the shipment of 3,000 Israeli rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition to the right-wing paramilitaries in 2001. The weapons were brought into Colombia through the port facility operated by Banadex, Chiquita’s subsidiary, and stored on the company’s docks before being distributed to the death squads.

Even Colombia’s right-wing President Alvaro Uribe – Washington’s closest ally – has voiced support for extradition of Chiquita officers, apparently in part to divert public attention from a massive political scandal engulfing his administration. Top ruling party politicians, as well as his foreign minister and former secret police director, have been arrested or forced to resign because of ties to the AUC death squads.

The Bush administration’s supposed zeal for its “global war on terror” notwithstanding, there is little danger that millionaire executives are going to be sent to Colombia to stand trial for financing and arming terrorists. In announcing the Chiquita plea bargain, US Attorney for the District of Columbia Jeffrey Taylor made this curious statement: “Funding a terrorist organization can never be treated as a cost of doing business. American businesses must take note that payments to terrorists are a whole different category. They are crimes.... American businesses, as good corporate citizens, will find ways to conform their conduct to the requirements

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Such methods of terror, violence and murder against the working class are, as the statement from the US attorney suggests, a common business practice, dedicated to improving the bottom line

of the law and still remain competitive.”

Clearly implied in this statement is that Chiquita’s financing of the death squads in Colombia was a means of increasing its competitiveness and its profits. How does this work? Quite simply, the right-wing terrorists earn their money by terrorizing workers, murdering those who seek to organize struggles for higher wages or improved conditions and threatening the rest that the same will happen to them if they don’t submit.

Over the past six years, more than 800 union officials and organizers have been assassinated in Colombia – and more than 4,000 since 1986 – with virtually no one punished. It is routine for employers to utilize the right-wing paramilitaries as hit-men against their own rebellious employees.

An example of this process involving another US multinational is working its way through the legal systems in both the US and Colombia. Colombian prosecutors have opened a formal investigation against the Alabama-based coal producer Drummond Co. Inc. on charges that company paid a paramilitary leader to carry out the death squad murders of three union officials at its coal mine in the northeast of the country. The company is being sued in a civil case involving the same charges in Alabama, where Drummond is headquartered.

Such methods of terror, violence and murder against the working class are, as the statement from the US attorney suggests, a common business practice, dedicated to improving the bottom line. To “conform their conduct to the requirements of the law and still remain competitive,” as the prosecutor suggests, can

be accomplished as simply as finding or organizing new death squads that are not on the State Department’s official terrorist list. No doubt, Chiquita is more than up to such a task. The company, the successor to the United Fruit Company, has more than a century of experience in organizing invasions, right-wing coups, massacres and assassinations.

Through much of the twentieth century, the operations of the government and United Fruit in Central America, Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America were tightly integrated – as in the organization of the CIA-backed coup in Guatemala that overthrew the reformist government of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954.

Given the Justice Department’s kid-gloves treatment for Chiquita, there is every reason to believe that this relationship continues, and that the company’s financing of the AUC took place with the approval of the Bush administration in Washington.

This is the reality of Washington’s so-called “war on terrorism.” It is utilized as a propaganda tool for justifying unprovoked wars of aggression abroad and terrorizing the American people and attacking their democratic rights at home. For this purpose, “terrorists” must be discovered and prosecuted, in their vast majority hapless victims of FBI entrapment operations. Meanwhile, real terror remains a vital instrument for imposing the interests of US-based transnational corporations and banks all over the world, and those who practice it are protected by the government. **CT**

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