

August 4, 2003

LIBERIA'S RIGHT TO LIVE

As I write, peacekeepers have finally dawdled into Liberia with three US troop ships off the coast “monitoring” developments. It is as if the world was saying to the increasingly desperate plight of a half-starved and war-ravaged people that we want to help you, ‘but we can wait.’ Think about how the world was suckered into believing that Saddam was capable of launching chemical weapons in 45 minutes. Very little ever gets done in so little time. Just processing the paper work takes longer.

Perhaps that’s why Colin Powell has announced today that he is leaving when the next or current president is sworn in next January. Who knows what may be lurking in the corridors of this cabal? Perhaps the advance notice gives him enough time for his agent to shop the next book deal, and the Administration to have to leave him alone. He could become one of those loose cannons now that his date of departure is on record.

AFTER IRAQ: IS THE WORLD SAFER?

DO I have to ask? Anxiety levels are up with the appearance of a new Al Qaeda audio tape threatening new attacks if Muslim detainees at Guantanamo are harmed. An earlier tape attributed to al-Zawahri was broadcast May 21 on the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera satellite station. The voice believed to be that of the Egyptian-born doctor urged Muslims to stage terrorist strikes against Jews, Americans, and U.S. allies. U.S. officials said

at the time that it was plausible that the speaker was al-Zawahri.

Already the security overreaction is in high gear with new travel rules that will require hundreds of thousands of people who transit through US airports to have a visa. (That’s more revenue by the way for the US treasury.)

NO FLY ZONE FOR ACTIVISTS

THE INDEPENDENT in London is all over a related story that has somehow missed the vigilant US press. Check it out. It could affect you: “After more than a year of complaints by some US anti-war activists that they were being unfairly targeted by airport security, Washington has admitted the existence of a list, possibly hundreds or even thousands of names long, of people it deems worthy of special scrutiny at airports. The list had been kept secret until its disclosure last week by the new US agency in charge of aviation safety, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). And it is entirely separate from the relatively well-publicized “no-fly” list, which covers about 1,000 people believed to have criminal or terrorist ties that could endanger the safety of their fellow passengers.

The strong suspicion of such groups as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which is suing the government to try to learn more, is that the second list has been used to target political activists who challenge the government in entirely legal ways. The TSA acknowledged the existence

of the list in response to a Freedom of Information Act request concerning two anti-war activists from San Francisco who were stopped and briefly detained at the airport last autumn and told they were on an FBI no-fly list.

The activists, Rebecca Gordon and Jan Adams, work for a small pacifist magazine called War Times and say they have never been arrested, let alone have criminal records. Others who have filed complaints with the ACLU include a left-wing constitutional lawyer who has been strip-searched repeatedly when traveling through US airports, and a 71-year-old nun from Milwaukee who was prevented from flying to Washington to join an anti-government protest....

That will stop Al Qaeda won't it?

THE LOGIC OF OCCUPATION

AS for stopping terrorism, the US military has stepped up raids in Iraq and claims to have arrested a "targeted leader;" no name given, of course. Over the weekend Mr Khadafi of Libya turned up on ABC to predict that the killings of Americans will continue. "If they say they will kill 365 a year, they will," he said more in sadness than glee. He says that US policy has turned bin Laden into a hero throughout the Islamic world. The reasons he cites for the violence is the logic of occupation – not a Saddam inspired plot.

Tom Dispatch.com cuts through some of the post of the post war noting: "Last night, I made it to the TV news for the first time in two weeks and there was Chairman Bremer swearing we were making "progress" in Iraq. I thought after two TV-less weeks that I had stumbled through a time warp or a worm hole directly into the late 1960s. Honestly, what this administration needs, minimally, is me. I could, at least, vet their spin dic-

tionaries for them. Somebody certainly should.

"I could remind them that there's nothing more dangerous than announcing "progress" when you face the unknown amid obvious catastrophe. That's a Vietnam lesson simple enough even for these guys to grasp – or so you would think. He quotes Robert Fisk of the Independent thusly: "Iraq cannot be 'spun'? This country is living a tragedy of epic proportions, and now - after its descent into hell under Saddam - we are doomed to suffer its contagion. By our hubris and by our lies and our fantasies we are descending into the pit."

HOW MANY? HOW MUCH?

TWO more questions before we leave Iraq to its own devices this AM. First, just how many US soldiers have died, and been wounded, and what is it gonna cost us. You can do the cost benefit analysis. The answer to the first question seems to be far more than we know. The Mail and Guardian reports:

US military casualties from the occupation of Iraq have been more than twice the number most Americans have been led to believe because of an extraordinarily high number of accidents, suicides, and other non-combat deaths in the ranks that have gone largely unreported in the media.

<http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?a=13&o=26087>

On the second point Martin Sieff reports (via Undernews): "The liberation of Iraq was to have been the war that paid for itself in spades, and gave U.S. corporations the inside track on the greatest energy bonanza of the 21st century. Instead, it has become a fiscal nightmare, a monetary Vietnam that already accounts for around 15 percent of the U.S. annual budget deficit, a figure

likely to only grow remorselessly into the unforeseeable future. . . On July 26, Republican Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told National Public Radio that rebuilding Iraq is certain to cost U.S. taxpayers tens of billions of dollars over the next few years. He estimated the rebuilding costs alone at \$30 billion.”

Final item: Iraq as war may be “over” but Iraq as TV drama flows on. Tom Hayden writes about what may be next on Alternet: To judge from the excited build-up, Saddam Hussein will be killed very soon. Once his location is identified, the spectacle of his death can soon be orchestrated. To have the greatest impact, perhaps it will be televised in all time zones on a weekday, avoiding the competition of weekend sports. There must be burnt offerings and a triumphal revelation of the corpse. For an insecure America, this killing will be a “ritual of blood,” a “compact of fellowship” – terms used by West Indian sociologist Orlando Patterson in the context of ritual lynchings in the Old South.”

CHALLENGING THE PARADIGM

THE best news on TV is not on a news channel but the Comedy Channel. Hats off to John Stewart and team who are consistently skewering the zeitgeist. He is proposing a 24 hour FAKE News Channel. “I do believe we need to go to a 24-hour fake news channel,” he said. “Fox can’t be the only fake news channel out there!” Earthlink.net carries the story.

“He and “The Daily Show” are up for five Emmys next month, and the Television Critics Association gave him two awards last month. The critics even nominated “The Daily Show” for best achievement in news, along with “60 Minutes”

and “Nightline.”

“The Daily Show” recognizes that its audience has an astute media awareness, too. Stewart made note last week, for example, that The New York Times used an obituary of comedian Bob Hope written by a reporter, Vincent Canby, who died in 2000.

Stewart also didn’t let the latest odd Dan Rather moment pass by. He played tape of when the CBS anchor, in a deadpan voice, recited lyrics to “Take Me Home, Country Road” when former POW Jessica Lynch returned to West Virginia.

“I’m just glad he didn’t keep going,” Stewart said later. “He could have. There’s more choruses. He could have gone into ‘Annie’s Song.’ He could have gone into Jim Croce. He was on a roll.”

http://start.earthlink.net/newsarticle?cat=3=D7SML0JG1_story

MEDIA ACTIVISTS WRITE ON

MEDIA activism is in high gear. Jay Levin reports from LA that “To keep the pressure on, Media Challenge! is joining MoveOn’s letter-writing campaign to newspapers drawing attention to TV networks’ appalling disinformation role in not reporting many administration lies (far more than the Niger uranium story) as they were exposed in the print media during the run-up to the war and since. In your letters,

Demand that networks (1) expose all distorted claims about the need for war in Iraq and (2) reveal the enormous cost of the Bush lies in terms of lives and family anguish (U.S. and Iraqi) and dollars. For details on the distortions, go to www.mediachallenge.org (where you can also find how to contact the networks directly if you want to take an additional action.)

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER

MOVEON'S suggestions on writing a letter to the editor: Your newspaper's letters page should give you an email address or fax number to use, or you can try Congress.org's database: <http://congress.org/congressorg/dbq/media/>

Your own words, written from the heart, are always best. Brevity is the soul of wit.

Cite a specific article published recently in the subject IN YOUR LOCAL PAPER. The key to publication is to pounce on a story or op-ed piece you've seen in THAT newspaper. Quote the story's headline and date it appeared in the paper.

Include your name, address, and phone number when submitting your letter. Editors need to call you to verify authorship before they can print your letter. They don't print your phone number.

AIR TIME FOR CANDIDATES?

COMMON Cause announced their support for a bill requiring TV and radio broadcasters to use part of their public interest obligation to provide minimum airtime to political candidates in order to educate voters. Introduced by Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and others, the "Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Act" would mandate two hours of political or issue-related content per week during an election. "Congress has made it clear that they realize that Americans want some control over the airwaves they own," said Chellie Pingree, president of Common Cause, adding that "the next step is to give the public what it wants and needs for a democracy to thrive: an equal and balanced presentation of political views." The bill would further require that all such programming, which could include issue-oriented debates, must air between 6 a.m. and midnight, that all candidates

be charged the same rate as year-round advertisers, and that a voucher system be created for federal candidates to buy airtime.

<http://www.commoncause.org/news/default.cfm?ArtID=215>

MEDIA PRIZES

THE International Federation of Journalists today announced a shortlist of 16 world-class journalists who are in line for five \$10,000 awards in this year's Natali Prize for Journalism: Excellence in Reporting Human Rights, Democracy and Development.

The awards will be presented to the winners at a special ceremony to be held at the International Press Centre Résidence Palace in Brussels in October 2003. With over 300 entries from all corners of the world, this year's Natali Prize encompasses a multitude of diverse cultures, all displaying top-quality standards of journalism from many of the world's great newspapers," said Aidan White, General Secretary of the IFJ, which manages the prize on behalf of the European Commission."

WHY JOURNALISTS DEFER TO POWER

WE want to encourage more prizes and honors like these if only to persuade journalists to avoid dependence on official sources. Media scholar Robert Jensen writes about why journalists tend to do that in a column carried on ZNET. Here's part of what he says: "Playing the game by the rules of the powerful is:

– the safest way to get stories; editors rarely object, and such methods reduce the likelihood a reporter will be taken to task by sources.

– the easiest way to get stories; reporters often can get by with nothing more than attending a

MEDIA DIARY DANNY SCHECHTER

briefing and making a few phone calls.

“ – a reliable route to career advancement; staying within these boundaries is unlikely to get one labeled a trouble-maker with the managers who make decisions about promotions.

“The folks running media outlets – who tend to be even more establishment-oriented than front-line journalists – don’t complain much about the way in which officials control the news because it

reduces labor costs. If news managers encouraged reporters routinely to go beyond the canned press releases, briefings, and insider interviews, those reporters would not be able to pump out as many stories as quickly. (I know this not only from research and analysis, but personal experience; for a number of years I was one of those reporters doing the pumping, making my editors happy by providing a reliable flow of stories.)”

