

July 1, 2003

# TEARS FOR DIXIE LAND

**W**elcome to a new month, the flowering of summer in the good old USA, and a period of deepening contradictions on every continent. On our shores, buffeted by tropical storm BILL (named after Clinton?), we have a President who has just put \$30 million into his campaign coffers after a few weeks of “work” – more than all the Democrats put together, and a Secretary of Defense who refuses to concede that US forces are facing a growing guerilla war in Iraq (two more dead today, more wounded). He played games with a CNN correspondent yesterday on how you define guerilla war. It sounded like a throwback to the past administration’s verbal gymnastics on how to define sex.

I will spare you some thoughts on making love as opposed to making war. Anyway, Rummy is off to South Carolina today with Dick Cheney in tow to pay last respects to that fallen white hope of Dixie, Strom Thurmond. At least CNN reminded us this morning that it was at last year’s tribute to the former segregationist leader that the then Senate Majority leader put foot in mouth. Stay tuned.

## **STANDING UP IN HONG KONG**

**THE** world’s attention span will shift today across the world to Hong Kong, where tens of thousands are expected to take to the streets to protest new laws being engineered by China to squash free expression. It’s been six years since the former British colony was “returned to the motherland.”

At the time Chinese authorities pledged not to interfere in the city-state’s internal affairs.

Today the EU and many world bodies are alarmed by violations of that pledge contained in a proposed (or perhaps, imposed) new security law. AFP reports: “The Greek presidency of the European Union Monday said it was concerned that proposed legislation in Hong Kong could undermine the territory’s autonomy. The European Union declared then that these proposals, if implemented, would blur the line between the Hong Kong and mainland legal systems and could undermine Hong Kong’s autonomy,” it said.

## **CENSORING CNN**

**ALREADY** China is censoring media coverage. AP reports: “CNN’s broadcast into China was cut Monday night during an interview with a critic of a planned Hong Kong anti-subversion law that opponents say could stifle the media. The network’s programming was cut for about 20 seconds during a report featuring opposition Hong Kong lawmaker Emily Lau. The report cut off as Lau began to criticize the legislation, to be enacted within days, and the broadcast resumed after the interview ended.”

## **WHEN DID THEY KNOW?**

**AS** attacks in Iraq continue, attacks on Iraq policy are just as fervent. London’s Independent is reporting that, “a high-ranking American official who investigated claims for the CIA that Iraq was

seeking uranium to restart its nuclear program last night accused Britain and the US of deliberately ignoring his findings to make the case for war against Saddam Hussein.

### **AND WHEN DID THEY FORGET THEY KNEW IT?**

**“THE** retired US ambassador said it was all but impossible that British intelligence had not received his report – drawn up by the CIA – which revealed that documents, purporting to show a deal between Iraq and the west African state of Niger, were forgeries. When he saw similar claims in Britain’s dossier on Iraq last September, he even went as far as telling CIA officials that they needed to alert their British counterparts to his investigation.

Amnesty International has issued a report indicting US military interrogation techniques. Wire service reports say: “An Iraqi businessman detained during a raid on his home says U.S. interrogators deprived him of sleep, forced him to kneel naked and kept him bound hand and foot with a bag over his head for eight days.

“Khraisan al-Abally’s story, told to an Associated Press correspondent, comes as an Amnesty International report released Monday harshly criticizes American interrogation techniques.”

### **ALL MY TRIALS**

**IN** Japan, more than reports are being issued. I had an email advising that “a group of Japanese lawyers unveiled documents Monday “indicting” U.S. President George W. Bush for war crimes allegedly committed against the Afghan people since the United States-led coalition began its antiterrorism campaign in Afghanistan in October 2001.

“This is an act that breaks international rules, such as the idea of (honoring) human rights, which have been formed over so many years,” said Koken Tsuchiya, former president of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and head of the 11-member prosecutors’ team in the tribunal. “We decided this case has sufficient reason to be brought to court.” A civic tribunal will be held in Tokyo, with the first hearing scheduled for July 21.

Foreign Policy in Focus reports: “Responding to the U.S. request to send troops to occupied, post-war Iraq, India’s army is going full steam ahead with preparations for possible deployment. Meanwhile, Indian policymakers are grasping for justifications that the mobilization would be under a UN umbrella and would serve the national interest, neither of which is plausible.”

### **DID GOD MAKE HIM DO IT?**

**THE** other day I reported that President Bush told Palestinian leaders that “God” told him to go to war in Iraq. Now Ira Chernus, a teacher of religion, has written about the article in Ha’aretz. He asks: “Did God tell George W. Bush to strike at Al-Qaeda and Iraq? God only knows.” Before you jump to any conclusions, remember that you are reading a translation of a translation of a translation. Mahmoud Abbas does not speak English. Bush does not speak Arabic. If Bush said these words, or something like them, Abbas heard them from a translator. Then Abbas repeated them, as he remembered them a couple of weeks later, in Arabic. Some unknown person wrote down what he thought he heard Abbas say. Then Regular, or someone at Ha’aretz, translated them back into English – or perhaps first into Hebrew and then into English.

Chernus says: “Clearly, we don’t yet know what

Bush said, or why. Just as clearly, the man has some explaining to do. And whatever the truth of the matter, he has serious problems.

“First, let’s give him some benefit of the doubt. Maybe he never said it. The quote could be fabricated – though it is hard to see who would gain by making it up. Suppose he denies that the quote is accurate, or admits he said it but claims it was a mistake? Can he apologize for letting God’s will determine his most important decisions. How will that go down with his political base, the Christian right? They want him to proudly confirm the controversial remark. Of course he should consult God, they will say, before he decides to go to war. Of course he should be guided by the will of the Lord. Can Bush afford, politically, to distance himself from God? Even his political genius, Karl Rove, might lose sleep figuring out that one.”

### ROAD MAPPING

**IN** the Middle East a Palestinian was shot at a check point. Abbas and Ariel Sharon are due to meet. I have had emails from the Israeli consulate questioning the sincerity of Palestinian groups who pledged a cease fire. The New York Times takes this view today. James Bennet reports: “The agreement by the three main Palestinian factions to suspend attacks on Israelis is based on bad faith, and therefore fragile.” The Palestine Monitor says: “We are also concerned with what Sharon,s government may do in an attempt to destroy this ceasefire. In the past the Israeli government has instigated a policy of assassinations to provoke armed responses from the various Palestinian factions. We are concerned that Israel will effectively bring about the end of the ceasefire through such a policy yet again.” The Times quotes Samir Al-Mashhaarawi, a Fatah official, as saying: “After

September 11, the Palestinian resistance lost its international support. After the Iraq war, the Palestinian resistance lost its Arab support.” It now may have US support with Washington considering a major aid request by the Palestinian Authority.

### ACTING LIKE NAZIS?

**THE** BBC is still on any number of hot seats. Israeli government officials are accusing the BBC of acting like Nazis. Reports AP: “An Israeli government official said Sunday that a BBC program charging Israel with secretly stockpiling nuclear and chemical weapons demonized Israel in a way reminiscent of anti-Semitic tracts published in Nazi Germany. The BBC said it stood by the program.” (And in England today, the Beeb may be backing down. The Guardian reports: “The BBC is willing to offer the government an olive branch by admitting the source who claimed No. 10 had “sexed up” intelligence information may not have been entirely correct.”)

Palestinians are also criticizing US media for distortion. PM Watch report argues: “If you want to measure the extent to which the standards of American journalism have sunk, your best barometer is no doubt the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. There you will find not only the usual lack of investigative backbone that now prevails across the American journalism landscape, or the remarkable self-censorship with which the American media goes about “covering the news,” but at times you will encounter what can only be described as an astonishing and breathtaking OPEN refusal by the US media to live up to even the most basic responsibilities of being a journalist or running a newspaper.”

It cites as an example: “an editor at the interna-

tional desk of the Charlotte Observer was not only willing to publish a map that showed the Golan Heights as part of Israel, Jerusalem as its capital, and occupied Palestinian territories highlighted as territories under “Palestinian control,” but had no shame pointing out to PM WATCH’s Charlotte Observer monitor, Edie Garwood, that they published the map because AP and National Geographic had done the same! Is this really where American journalism has come to – to the point where editors don’t even think that it is problematic to say that they won’t bother to independently settle the most basic facts about the most explosive and enduring conflict of the last half century?

### **WEAPONS ARE US**

**SOUTH** Africa’s Mail and Guardian reports: “The

Pentagon is planning a new generation of weapons, including huge hypersonic drones and bombs dropped from space, that will allow the US to strike its enemies at lightning speed from its own territory.”

### **ALL POWER TO THE BLOGS**

**WIRED** reports that the “US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit shielded Webloggers, e-mail list administrators, and Website operators from libel claims for information they republish, effectively differentiating such publishers from “one-way” print media outlets. The court based its decision on the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which provides that “no provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.”

