

July 23, 2003

'WE TOOK THEM OUT,' WAR WINDS ON

According to Rym Brahimi, CNN's no-nonsense Baghdad bulletin bringer, locally, Urday and Usay Hussein, the sons of Saddam, who are no longer with us, were called "the cubs." As a former Cub Scout, I wonder if there may be a copyright infringement action here?

Depending on where you looked this morning, the reaction to their untimely demise—through what a US General (retired) told Fox News was a "rush and crush" maneuver and others say followed a six-hour gun battle with two guys holding off 350 US soldiers—was exuberant or mixed. (The story of these killings in Iraq pretty much drove the news of the continued killings of hundreds in Liberia off the air.)

REPORTING THE "TAKE-OUT"

IN just fifteen minutes this morning, I heard about a new communiqué from Saddam, recorded prior to these events, saw a member of the Iraq National Council on BBC advise that the attacks on US soldiers will likely continue because there is no evidence that this gruesome twosome was behind it all. I then read the "newspaper of record." Reports the New York Times: "With Hussein's Heirs Gone, Hopes Rise for End to Attacks . . . The deaths of Saddam Hussein's two eldest sons could be an important step in the campaign to control and end the guerrilla-style insurgency." The newspaper quotes a US soldier, Lt General Ricardo Sanchez, to make this so: "This will

prove to the Iraqi people that at least these two members of the regime will not be coming back into power."

That might be more likely had the Times produced any real evidence that these heirs were behind it all . . . They keep being linked to all the mass graves being uncovered in the South of Iraq and I have no doubts of their culpability. But have you noticed virtually none of these "contextualizing" tidbits mention the fact that the Shia were slaughtered after they rose against Saddam in response to a broken promise by George Bush (Senior) to support them.

And speaking of the Times, Editor and Publisher magazine reports an energetic response to a report suggesting that US casualties in Iraq are being seriously UNDER REPORTED. Editor Greg Mitchell reprints some of the response he is getting, including one about the TIMES: "Why aren't the national newspapers doing obits on all of these soldiers? The New York Times printed entire special sections on the World Trade Center dead, and won a Pulitzer for it — are these dead any less deserving?—Brad Smith, Los Angeles"

FAUX NEWS: JUMPING UP AND DOWN

OVER at the citadel of "real journalism," I saw Steve, Fox and Friends' comedy-weatherman, jump up and down about the \$30 million reward a man who says he is related to Saddam is expected to get for giving US Soldiers the tip on

their whereabouts and bemoaning those who want to try their evil dad without executing him afterwards.

As for executions, I wonder how “Steve-arino” would respond to the news that the Bush Administration has now promised the Blair Administration that it will not kill two British citizens held in Guantanamo. The NY Times reports: “Death Penalty Ruled Out for British Detainees...The Bush administration will not seek the death penalty for two Britons being held as terrorist suspects at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. And so that deal, as expected, went down. Tony took his ounce of flesh in return for services rendered.

And I saw a US soldier predict good times now that these wanted aces in the deck of bad guys were “taken out.” In Hong Kong and Washington, this latest bloodletting brought smiles to Mr. Blair and Mr. Bush. Maureen Dowd imagined the response in an imaginary letter from our imaginary vice president Mr. Cheney: “We are pumped about the double rubout of the Hussein boys. We really needed that win. It could be a game-changer for us. The stock market killed on the killings....”

Unfortunately, two more Americans were also killed today and retaliation for the liquidations of “the cubs” is expected.

WILL IT “HAUNT US?”

OUR regular correspondent Da’ud X Mohammed reflects on this triumph: “Although there has yet to be any DNA-type proof from an entity other than the U.S. government’s propaganda machine ... just for argument’s sake let’s say the “story” is true: that the pig-latin twins U-day and Q-say indeed got got; i.e., killed dead.

“Although there is great joy in many quarters

over those hoped-for deaths, that it was our guys who killed them instead of letting some disgruntled Saddam-hating Iraqi do the dirty work will haunt us from now until after hell freezes over. After their discovery, we would have been a lot better off to surround and out-wait U and Q, and then eventually take them alive and let the Iraqi people put them on trial for atrocities rather than having used our own soldiers to be their judge, jury and executioner ...”

Oh Da’ud, don’t you realize that this is like the smell of napalm in the morning....[—DS]

FISK: US ACCUSED OF ABUSE

UNREPORTED in the US press, but all over London’s Independent is a story about the treatment of prisoners in Iraq by US soldiers who turn out to be not all that different from the Saddamites when it comes to upholding human rights. Robert Fisk reports:

“Sources” may be a dubious word in journalism right now, but the sources for the beatings in Iraq are impeccable. This story is also about the gunning down of three prisoners in Baghdad, two of them “while trying to escape”. But most of all, it’s about Qais Mohamed al-Salman. Qais al-Salman is just the sort of guy the US ambassador Paul Bremer and his dead-end assistants need now. He hated Saddam, fled Iraq in 1976, then returned after the “liberation” with a briefcase literally full of plans to help in the restoration of his country’s infrastructure and water purification system.

“His story: ‘A civilian car came up with American soldiers in it. Then more soldiers in military vehicles. I told them I didn’t understand what had happened, that I was a scientific researcher. But they made me lie down in the street, tied my arms behind me with plastic-and-steel cuffs and tied up

my feet and put me in one of their vehicles.'

MAKING A SHOW FOR THE PRESS

THE next bit of his story carries implications for our own journalistic profession. "After 10 minutes in the vehicle, I was taken out again. There were journalists with cameras. The Americans untied me, then made me lie on the road again. Then, in front of the cameras, they tied my hands and feet all over again and put me back in the vehicle."

"If this wasn't a common story in Baghdad today - if the gross injustices meted out to ordinary Iraqis and the equally gross mistreatment in America's prison camps here was not so common - then Qais al-Salman's story would not be so important." He tells the story of a sewer of a detention center called Camp Cropper.

FCC BATTLE: WILL DEFEAT BE SNATCHED FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY?

YESTERDAY afternoon, I passed on last minute appeal from media reform activists to press the Congress to vote to overrule The FCC. It looks like it is happening although a veto still lurks in the wings. The New York Times credits Republicans, not activists, for the brakes being put on the FCC sellout to BIG media. Stephan Labaton reports: "Until recent days, the nation's largest media conglomerates had hoped that the House of Representatives would kill the growing political efforts to overturn their recent deregulation.

"But in a stunning political development, the House now appears poised to support the reversal of a new rule that permits the nation's biggest TV networks to grow even larger....

"Because a Senate committee recently approved

a similar measure by a broad bipartisan majority, the movement in the House increases the likelihood that Congress will reverse at least some key elements of the new media ownership rules adopted last month by the Federal Communications Commission. In recent days, the White House has publicly joined the debate, saying that advisers have recommended that President Bush veto the legislation if it is passed by both houses.

"Such a veto could be overridden by two-thirds of the voting members of the House and Senate...."

So this campaign is not out of the Washington woods yet....More pressure will be needed....

San Francisco's Media Alliance reports that while all this going on in the public eye, out of public view the FCC is harassing community radio stations: "San Francisco Liberation Radio 93.7 FM, has been broadcasting as a vital community resource for 10 years, but was recently visited by the FCC and threatened with closure."

BBC — KELLY CONTROVERSY SIMMERS

THE BBC Wars continue in the UK with the Telegraph reporting that the Murdoch newspapers are leading the charge as the Dr. Kelly suicide and the BBC controversy we have been writing about continues to make waves. It now turns out that the BBC has tape of Kelly's contentions ("serious concerns" that the UK government misused the weapons issue.) There are now attacks on the BBC's Governors as well as an internal battle within the Blair government about who first named Kelly as the BBC's source.

It appears that the government, not the BBC, were the first to identify Kelly. This may or may not be true; it doesn't seem to matter when it

comes to debating journalistic ethics in the matter.

Should the BBC have leaked their source even AFTER Kelly's death? The Associated Press's David Brauder spoke to editors worldwide: "The BBC's announcement prompted strong reaction worldwide.

"I was surprised that the BBC published the information," said Rolf Stengaard, interim head of the Ekot news program on Swedish public radio. "It is very important for the media. It means that anyone can go to the press with information without risking anything."

In Norway, Per Egil Hegge, editor-at-large for the Aftenposten newspaper, said: "There are very good arguments for protecting sources after their deaths. It is maybe something that could be discussed in this case, but also dead sources have the right to protection."

In Asia, Enayet Khan, chief editor of the United News of Bangladesh news agency, said: "We would keep it confidential and would only reveal it to a very special agency....I think this kind of disclosure ... is not correct."

German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung said that ...both the BBC and the defense minister had "abused (Kelly's) openness"; France's Le Monde, in an editorial titled "Death and Lies," said Kelly's death should not shift attention from the government's role in the controversy. The serious political crisis confronting the British prime minister does not find its origin in the death of David Kelly, the British arms expert, but in his government lying about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq," it said in its Tuesday edition.

THE OTHER ISRAEL

A LEAD article in the Village Voice this weeks

focuses attention on the underside of life in Israel. It is about homelessness in the Homeland and also carries some statistics we rarely see in the reporting which just focuses on the cycle of violence and retribution. Check it out. Here's a taste of a summary by Anya Kamenetz:

"Israel's economy, only five years ago blooming with tourism and high-tech industry, is in its third year of recession. As reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in December, Ran Cohen, head of the Knesset's committee on social gaps, says the nation is now "a society deep in the process of total collapse."

1. Poverty line in Israel: \$934 a month for a family of four
2. Number of Israelis below that line: 1.2 million, or one in five
3. Percentage increase from 2001 to 2002 in number of poor children in Israel: almost 50 percent
4. Number of poor children: 530,000, or 25 percent of all youths
5. Average monthly income for richest 10 percent of Israeli households: \$9,000
6. Average for poorest 10 percent: \$716
7. Factor by which the most wealthy are richer than the poorest: 12
8. Unemployment in first quarter of 2003: 10.8 percent
9. Rank of Israel's unemployment rate among industrialized nations: 2

BOB MOSES: CIVIL RIGHTS HERO

I OFTEN like to salute the heroes of our age. One of them is Bob Moses who I first met as a civil rights worker in Mississippi back in the early sixties. He is still at it. The gutsy Donna Ladd who edits the Jackson Free Press caught up with Bob

MEDIA DIARY DANNY SCHECHTER

at a commemoration of the murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and my Cornell college mate Mickey Schwerner. He was speaking, softly as he always does at a church that had been

burned down by the Klan in 1964. In his tribute to these martyrs of the movement Bob said: "One of the best things about this country is that you can live a life in struggle."

