

July 29, 2003

BETTING ON THE BAD STUFF

Let's see? What can we bet on? More terrorist attacks? Sounds likely. More resistance in Iraq?

Highly probable. More chaos in world affairs? Indubitably. Yes folks, line up at the window and place your wagers because as the dog days of August loom nearer, the fun-and-bangs gang has come up with a new idea. No, the story is not in the Onion. It is in today's New York Times: "The Pentagon office that proposed spying electronically on Americans to monitor potential terrorists has a new experiment. It is an online futures trading market, disclosed today by critics, in which anonymous speculators would bet on forecasting terrorist attacks, assassinations and coups."

Traders bullish on a biological attack on Israel or bearish on the chances of a North Korean missile strike would have the opportunity to bet on the likelihood of such events on a new Internet site established by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

The Pentagon called its latest idea a new way of predicting events and part of its search for the "broadest possible set of new ways to prevent terrorist attacks." At least two members of Congress are trying to kill the measure controlled by the old Iran Contraite John Poindexter, the man who gave us Total Information Awareness. If you want to become a trader – no, Ann Coulter, trader, not traitor – check out our website du jour: <http://www.policyanalysisismarket.org>

This new approach may be just in time since the

Washington Post is running reports that Al Qaeda is feared to have some new plans afoot for more spectacular terrorist attacks using aircraft. Perhaps Osama and the Post just hadn't remembered President Bush's most recent assurance on this issue. Clip these words and post them on your refrigerator:

"Al Qaeda is on the run. Right now, about half of all the top Al Qaeda operatives are either jailed or dead. In either case, they're not a problem anymore." George Bush, May 5, 2003"

THE FCC WARS: "IT AIN'T OVER YET"

IN Washington it's round three of a scheduled ten-rounder on FCC rules revision issue. The FCC's Republican majority voted for the giveaway June 2. Later in the month, and into July, Congress responded by slapping the agency upside the head. Congress said no by a whopping 400-21. Senator John McCain told the Chicago Tribune he was startled by the massive public response: "I never expected it to be on the radar screen," he admitted.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/chi0307270286jul27,1,2777530.story> .

But is that public anger stopping the media congloms? Are the companies who always say they – but for or by the grace of God – give the public what it wants, are they backing down?

No way. MSNBC.com, the site owned by Microsoft and General Electric reports: "The

media giants are pledging to wage a fierce battle in Congress to protect, and even add to, their recent gains in the relaxing of media ownership restrictions." Note the term, "protect and even add to." FCC Chairman Michael Powell was all over the NY Times op-ed page yesterday instructing us all on how stupid we are, how we misunderstand the complexities of his plan, how it has been distorted, and that the people opposing his measures are really against content, not concentrated ownership.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/28/opinion/28POWE.html>

A PORN CONNECTION?

IT is not clear what content he wants to protect. His fellow Commissioner Michael Copps suggests a link between media concentration and all those news shows dripping with sexual titillation. It is strange that an Administration with a political base in Christian churches is oblivious to this concern.

This issue of morality and, inevitably, hypocrisy is not just a domestic concern. Critics overseas, like George Monbriot in *The Guardian*, possibly unaware of the moral decline of US television under Bush rule, sees US policy as more influenced by religious ideas than political ones. In fact, he sees America itself, less as a state and more as a religion.

"The United States is no longer just a nation. It is now a religion. Its soldiers have entered Iraq to liberate its people not only from their dictator, their oil, and their sovereignty, but also from their darkness. As George Bush told his troops on the day he announced victory, "wherever you go, you carry a message of hope – a message that is ancient and ever new. In the words of the prophet

Isaiah, "To the captives, 'come out,' and to those in darkness, 'be free.'"

"So American soldiers are no longer merely terrestrial combatants, they have become missionaries. They are no longer simply killing enemies, they are casting out demons. The people who reconstructed the faces of Uday and Qusay Hussein carelessly forgot to restore the pair of little horns on each brow, but the understanding that these were opponents from a different realm was transmitted nonetheless. Like all those who send missionaries abroad, the high priests of America cannot conceive that the infidels might resist through their own free will; if they refuse to convert, it is the work of the devil, in his current guise as the former dictator of Iraq."

WE ARE GOING TO GET HIM. REPEAT AFTER ME: WE ARE

TODAY in Iraq the hunt for Saddam goes on with breathless news reports, and green night-scope footage of raids by GIs. We are getting closer we are told. The chase after Saddam is just about the only story we are seeing.

The Independent's Robert Fisk, as usual, offers a very different view of the cops and robbers scenario we are seeing. He reported: "Obsessed with capturing Saddam Hussein, American soldiers turned a botched raid on a house in the Mansur district of Baghdad yesterday into a bloodbath, opening fire on scores of Iraqi civilians in a crowded street and killing up to 11, including two children, their mother and crippled father. At least one civilian car caught fire, cremating its occupants.

Amid the fury generated among the largely middle-class residents of Mansur – by ghastly coincidence, the killings were scarcely 40 metres from

the houses in which 16 civilians died when the Americans tried to kill Saddam towards the end of the war in April – whatever political advantages were gained by the killing of Saddam’s sons have been squandered. A doctor at the Yarmouk hospital, which received four of the dead, turned on me angrily last night, shouting: “If an American came to my emergency room, maybe I would kill him.”

“Yet again, false informers, ill-trained American soldiers who appeared to exercise no fire control and a lack of military planning has created a tragedy among the people the Americans claimed to be ‘liberating’ from Saddam Hussein only 15 weeks ago.”

IRAQ IN “TOTAL CHAOS”

WHILE “experts” on Fox News this morning offered reassurances that it is only “a matter of time,” Reuters reports: “ARABS SHOCKED BY TV IMAGES OF SADDAM’S SONS: Although Uday and Qusay are criminals, displaying their corpses like this is disgusting and repulsive. America claims it is civilized but is behaving like a thug.”

This view was echoed by a member of the US-organized Iraqi Reconstruction Council who has resigned because he says he “doesn’t want to be a collaborator.” Writing in *The Guardian*, he explained: “Iraq is now in almost total chaos. No one knows what is going on. We’re not talking here about trying to achieve an ideal political system. People cannot understand why a superpower that can amass all that military might can’t get the electricity back on. Iraqis are now contrasting Saddam’s ability to bring back power after the war in 1991 to the apparent inability of the US to do so now. There are all kinds of conspiracy theories.”

OPERATION ROCKINGHAM

IN Britain, there are charges that the intelligence agencies ran a special operation to distort the weapons of mass destruction issue. Neil Mackay of *The Glasgow Herald* reveals “Britain ran a covert ‘dirty tricks’ operation designed specifically to produce misleading intelligence that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction to give the UK a justifiable excuse to wage war on Iraq.

Operation Rockingham, established by the Defense Intelligence Staff within the Ministry of Defence in 1991, was set up to ‘cherry-pick’ intelligence proving an active Iraqi WMD programme and to ignore and quash intelligence, which indicated that Saddam’s stockpiles had been destroyed or wound down.

The paper cites former US UN weapons instructor Scott Ritter as confirming the existence of the unit saying it was controlled by “the highest levels” of the British government. Ritter now has a new book out, “Frontier Justice: Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Bushwhacking of America” from Context Books. (See contextbooks.com for more.) Investigative journalist Sy Hersh praises Ritter for “being right in the most important issue facing America today, the misuse of intelligence in the war against Iraq.”

MEDIA DEFERENCE TO BUSH BLAMED FOR HIGH RATINGS

IN Britain, these intelligence failures and their political abuse has led to a fall-off in Tony Blair’s approval ratings. Why not in America? Writing in the *New York Times* today, Paul Krugman returns to a central theme that I pound away on every day: the role of the media. He explains how Bush has managed to insulate himself from public dis-

approval: “One answer, surely, is the kid-gloves treatment Mr. Bush has always received from the news media, a treatment that became downright fawning after Sept. 11. There was a reason Mr. Blair’s people made such a furious attack on the ever-skeptical BBC.”

Elsewhere, conflicts rage. Liberia remains one of them. US policy came in for criticism from Nicholas Kristoff of the Times: “it looks as if Mr. Bush’s Africa policy may be no more than a symbolic one, full of ringing sound bites and hollow pledges. Mr. Bush refused to ask Congress for funds to pay fully for his AIDS program. And his Africa trip had a check-the-box quality, suggesting it was more about domestic politics than Africa itself.

“Worst of all, with Monrovia (named for James Monroe) now collapsing into killing and cholera, Mr. Bush has sent a symbolic presence to the waters off Monrovia for possible deployment later. Africa needs a lot of things, but symbols aren’t high on the list.”

AFGHANISTAN: THE WAR WE “WON”

BACK in Afghanistan, Eurasianet says the Taliban is back with a vengeance. The well-informed Ahmed Rashid reports: Taliban forces based in Pakistan are intensifying attacks on US and Afghan government forces. According to the top US general in Afghanistan, Taliban fighters and affiliated Islamic militants have divided eastern Afghanistan into three zones for launching attacks. Meanwhile, al Qaeda is offering bounties for killing or capturing US troops.

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav072803.shtml>

A new human rights report charges that US-backed officials in that country are backing mili-

tias that survive through extortion, armed robbery, and kidnapping. They are major human rights abusers, it says.

SHARON’S TURN AT WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT Bush welcomes Ariel Sharon to the White House. In advance of his visit, he released more prisoners as required under the road map. He also has eliminated three checkpoints in the occupied areas. This is not enough, counter Palestinians; at least 157 checkpoints and roadblocks remain. Also at issue is the “security wall” that Israel has been building.

HUNTER S. THOMPSON FIRES A MISSILE

IN our media news, here is a voice we haven’t heard from for a long time. Throughout the Vietnam War, critics looked to the reportage of Hunter S Thompson, the doctor of gonzo journalism, for insights found nowhere else. His mighty pen seems to have been in retirement, but recently he has unleashed a new polemical barrage about the current situation. Herewith a sample. It appears he has been not in the best of health:

“When I went into the clinic last April 30, George Bush was about 50 points ahead of his closest Democratic opponent in next year’s Presidential Election. When I finally escaped from the horrible place, less than three weeks later, Bush’s job-approval ratings had been cut in half – and even down into single digits, in some states – and the Republican Party was panicked and on the run. It was a staggering reversal in a very short time, even shorter than it took for his equally crooked father to drop from 93 percent approval, down to as low as 43 percent and even 41 percent

MEDIA DIARY DANNY SCHECHTER

in the last doomed days of the first doomed Bush Administration.

“The Rumsfeld-Cheney axis has self-destructed right in front of our eyes, along with the once-proud Perle-Wolfowitz bund that is turning to wax. They somehow managed to blow it all, like a gang of kids on a looting spree, between January and July, or even less. It is genuinely incredible. The U.S. Treasury is empty, we are losing that stupid, fraudulent chickencrap War in Iraq, and every country in the world except a handful of Corrupt Brits despises us. We are losers, and that is the one unforgivable sin in America.

“Beyond that, we have lost the respect of the world and lost two disastrous wars in three years. Afghanistan is lost, Iraq is a permanent war Zone, our national Economy is crashing all around us, the Pentagon’s “war strategy” has failed miserably, nobody has any money to spend, and our once-mighty U.S. America is paralyzed by mutinies in Iraq and even Fort Bragg.”

For more gonzology, this info: His latest book, “Kingdom of Fear,” has just been released. A regular contributor to various national and international publications, Thompson now lives in a fortified compound near Aspen, Colo.

