

July 3, 2003

BRING THEM ON! IS LIBERIA NEXT?

President Bush is talking tough again, wagging that finger (as well as, probably, that dog) and telling those that menace our troops that they will be dealt with. “Bring ‘em on” said the leader who vowed to bring them to “justice,” as he had about Osama bin Laden and Saddam. The “high sheriff” seems to be one of his many personalities, and it was on display again yesterday as his voice choked with anger. He also warned Liberia’s Charles Taylor to get out his country – not a bad idea – but to those following that country’s devolution, a bit late in the day. The New York Times reports that “Officials said they are considering sending 500 to 2,000 American troops to join a number of African nations in trying to restore stability in Liberia. I cringe whenever I read an article that begins “Officials say.”

THE TERMINATOR COMETH

BEFORE we return to that African country – once home to Firestone’s rubber plantations and ex-slaves and once considered a model state since it was built on self-styled American values – we take you back to Iraq where those to whom the “Bring them on” message was directed actually took the challenge and “brought it on.” Three more incidents today – including a brazen rocketing of a Humvee in downtown Baghdad in the middle of the day. One US soldier was reported wounded, and a six-year-old was mistakenly shot in retaliation, along with the gunman who reportedly pulled down the sun roof in his vehicle,

aimed and fired. And all just days before Arnold Schwarzenegger, that booster of Humvees and a wannabe Ronald Raygun in California, arrives in the gulf to show the latest Terminator movie, which critics say looks exactly like other Terminator movies. What a surprise.

As a result, the Coalition of the Drilling is inviting (seducing, bribing, cajoling, demanding???) other countries to send troops to help the US forces out. After months of dissing the UN and multilateral approaches, the US is now turning to them. So far here’s who has answered the call: Reports (AP) “Poland is sending 2,300 soldiers. Ukraine promises 1,800. Small bands of Macedonians and Albanians are already here. And Sri Lanka says it’s ready to consider requests for help.” With Sri Lanka involved, what can go wrong?

BEHIND THE IRAQ ATTACKS

THIS flurry of daily violent incidents in Iraq is not easing minds and hearts in America. It is motivating Democratic candidates to start speaking up, even as the Pentagon insists all is under control. I just came across what seems like a well informed and quite provocative blog called xymphora at blogspot.com which adds some context to all of this:

“The American army is proving itself to be utterly incompetent at keeping the peace in Iraq. The soldiers themselves express frustration at being asked to do something for which they have

absolutely no training. Their lack of training is having a direct causal effect on the increasingly bad relationship between the Americans and the Iraqis and is slowly leading to disaster as the levels of violence ratchet up. In keeping with the fascist roots of neo-conservatism, people like Rumsfeld believe that pure militarism is the answer to every problem, whether military or not. This means that the neo-cons have a complete aversion to the concept of peacekeeping, which supposedly saps the military killing spirit of the troops. Bush expressed this as his opposition to what he called 'nation-building'. During Bush's presidential campaign Condoleezza Rice said: "We don't need to have the Eighty-Second Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten."

"Consistent with this approach to the world, about a year ago the army announced it would be closing the Army War College's Peacekeeping Institute at Carlisle Barracks, the only institute it has devoted to peacekeeping, effective the end of September of this year. This saved them about \$200,000 in operating costs and, for 10 staff, about \$800,000 in salaries, for a grand total of \$1 million per year, .00025 percent of the military's annual budget (and, by the way, what did Bush's little aircraft carrier photo-op cost?). This frugality was from an organization that has managed to 'misplace' one trillion dollars. They claim that the function and mission of the institute will be transferred elsewhere, but that appears to be untrue. There is simply no place for peacekeeping in today's neo-con army, and this view of the world has already cost many lives."

PEACEKEEPING OR WAR MAKING?

HOW interesting! So what are the Washington

warriors proposing now? "Peacekeeping, of course." And in Liberia no less. CNN this a.m. trotted out images of Somalia to remind us that interventions in Africa don't always work out so well. It also reminded us that Bush the Senior had been asked to intervene a decade ago and didn't.

The Gully offers some background: "In the early 1820's, anti-slavery societies helped hundreds of freed U.S. slaves to resettle in coastal Africa, where they founded Liberia, a republic based on that of the United States. Even though indigenous people comprise 95% of the country's current population, descendants of those former slaves have ruled the country for the most part, maintaining strong ties to the United States.

"As a result, both Liberians and the international community are calling on the United States to prop up the tenuous June 17 ceasefire agreement between rebel forces and the government of President Charles Taylor to end three years of civil war. The main target of the rebel fighters is Taylor himself, a U.S.-educated, Libyan-trained former warlord, and Baptist preacher. A leader in an earlier civil war which led to free elections in 1996 and his presidential victory, Taylor has since alienated many indigenous groups, along with the political opposition.

"The United Nations and a number of countries, including Britain, France, and Liberia's West African neighbors, have stepped up efforts to persuade the United States to lead an international peacekeeping force. As United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan told the Security Council on Saturday, "The consequences of allowing the situation to spiral out of control are too terrible to contemplate."

Liberia's problems are worsened by HIV/AIDS. About 10% of the population is infected. While the

US State Department reportedly finds Liberia's problems a cause for concern, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told a news conference earlier this week that the US had "no vital interests" in Africa.

PHARMA CHIEF TO FIGHT AIDS

LET'S see who does have an interest. Who would that be? This press release just in: "The AIDS activist organization Health GAP responded with criticism today to the announcement of Randall ("Randy") Tobias as head of the Bush AIDS program. Tobias is the recently retired CEO of the U.S. pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly, a corporation with close ties to the Republican party and the Bush Administration."

I was on Talk radio with Kieno in South Africa yesterday for an hour and found lots of anger there with the US cut-off of military aid until that country signs a waiver to the International Criminal Court pledging not to prosecute American soldiers charged with war crimes. (I was surprised to be challenged by a call from Atlanta from someone listening on the Internet. He called to say that I was full of it and went on to characterize the NY Times and all the TV networks as extremist radical outlets.) Many people there were enraged by the US decision, although some feared that South Africa has to go along since the US is now their number one trading partner.

FAILURE SURROUNDS US

MEANWHILE, in the "bringing bad guys to justice department," the Mail and Guardian in South Africa is reporting this: "The South African courts and the Truth and Reconciliation process largely failed to unravel the whole truth around

apartheid atrocities, and this left people angry and disquieted, Cape High Court Judge Dennis Davis said on Wednesday."

That paper also reported a worse failure:

"World Bank projects costing hundreds of millions of pounds and aimed at cutting malnutrition among children in developing countries have completely failed to make any difference, according to a report published today."

UNITY IN EUROPE

THE EU is on fire after Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi, now the president of that body, told a German member of the European Parliament that he would make a good leader of a Nazi concentration camp. That remark did not go down well, and demands for an apology are disuniting that organ of European unity.

In England, a parliamentary committee spoke to British journalists about covering the Iraq war. All seemed to approve of the embedding but many noted its limits. Sky TV's Jeremy Thompson was questioned about reports and rumors that some journalists had brought along armed escorts of their own and that some may have used their weapons. The discussion was televised for hours on CSPAN.

Also in Parliament, some of England's biggest media moguls suffered a setback when Lord Puttman (David Puttnam, the film maker and one time studio head) managed to force the government to compromise plans to permit more cross-media ownership. This may block Murdoch's News Corporation there, but it is steaming ahead in China, where AOL-Time Warner just sold one of its properties.

IS THE BEEB ANTISEMITIC?

THE row between Israel and the BBC over the latter's broadcasting of a critical documentary on Israel has promoted a comment by Media Tenor's Roland Schatz and Israel's Eli Pollak in the Jerusalem Post who say: "Anti-Semitism is too easy an excuse for Israel's negative image." They explain:

"A debate is raging today in England over the BBC's role in the resurgence of anti-Semitism. The BBC may have broken basic codes of media ethics in its coverage of Israel. But Israel's image is not that much better in the U.S., Germany, South Africa and actually any region in the world where Israel and the Jewish community is covered in the media. Is the negative image dominated by anti-Semitism, or do other factors come into play? The key to the issue lies in the unspectacular.

"Media Tenor's study of media reports on Israel, the Jewish faith, and the Holocaust on a daily basis over a period of years, has made it possible to identify the journalistic methods and themes that have damaged Israel's image, its leadership and its people. The same elements may be found on either side of the Atlantic. Therefore, before resorting to the charge of anti-Semitism one should first attempt to understand the editorial policies underlying the damage. What are they? Are audiences in the U.S., Germany, the U.K. or South Africa given a chance to really understand the images that are pouring into their living rooms?

"Media Tenor's studies show that especially U.S. broadcasters give high priority to Israel. Editors at ABC, CBS and NBC consider events taking place between the Mediterranean and Jordan to be more newsworthy than news from Russia,

China or even Europe. This phenomenon cannot be rationalized in standard media coverage terms, such as geopolitical importance, economic impact, the drama of sports, or the public interest in celebrities. The fascination with Israel, even though its true international role is limited when compared to China, Russia or Europe, must have an explanation. Why then, this strong focus on Israel?

YOUR LETTERS

ADBUSTERS, which is running an "Unbrand America Campaign" by placing black dots in media outlets, writes: "We did it! Flip through the New York Times (Thursday, July 3rd) and you'll stumble onto a nervy, full-page black spot in all its subversive glory. Next up . . . TV." Check out the Unbrand America TV spot that's heating up network boardrooms at www.unbrandamerica.org/tv/

Next Rob Kall at www.OpEdNews.com writes to ask to reprint a column of mine that appeared yesterday in Newsday. He adds: "By the way, I wrote a piece today on the democratic primary fundraising. All the mainstream media reported that Bush raised far more money than any democratic candidate. My story reports that all the candidates together raised more than Bush. Why didn't any of them report it that way?"

There were letters about that column, too, showing receptiveness to critical ideas in mainstream media. Ted Bohne writes: "You know, Danny, I was just thinking. Damned near EVERY problem this country is embroiled in is DIRECTLY related to the stupidity of the Average American. Now I know this seems rather harsh, but information has always been available. With the advent of personal computers, any excuse for

not being aware vanished. Nothing more dangerous than someone who is dedicated to stupidity.

Phyllis Sato, from Virginia Beach: “The article ‘What do Americans know? Not very much,’ crystallized some important points about how “perception management” is informing the public. Thanks for the insights. Do we have to fight fire with fire? Instead of thoughtful analysis, do we have to select potent images? Otherwise this steamroller is going to take away our choices.”

Jeff Gorski writes from Cali: “Danny: Great column – a breath of fresh air in the smog of conservative trash talk. As to how to combat this giant – we need to have our own TV news program with a willingness to have progressive discussions and dialogue with people such as yourself, Greg Palast, Norman Solomon, Robert Parry etc. Until we come up with the money to initiate that we are at the mercy of conservative bias all over the Networks. Keep up the great work.”

OUR HISTORY CHANNEL MINUTE

HERE'S a historical consideration. Whenever 86-year-old historian Eric Hobsbawm speaks, I listen. And he is speaking now about trends in the US.

Here's a historian you never see on the History Channel. Writing in the Chronicle of Higher Education, he notes “As a historian I know that behind this apparent shifting stability, large and long-term changes are taking place, perhaps fundamental ones. Nevertheless, they are concealed by the deliberate resistance to change of American public institutions and procedures, and the habits of American life, as well as what Pierre Bourdieu called in more general terms its habitus, or way of doing things. Forced into the straitjacket of an 18th-century Constitution reinforced by two centuries of Talmudic exegesis by the lawyers, the theologians of the republic, the institutions of the U.S.A. are far more frozen into immobility than those of almost all other states. It has so far even postponed such minor changes as the election of an Italian, or Jew, let alone a woman, as head of government. But it has also made the government of the U.S.A. largely immune to great men, or indeed to anybody, taking great decisions, since rapid, effective national decision-making, not least by the president, is almost impossible. The United States, at least in its public life, is a country that is geared to operate with mediocrities, because it has to, and it has been rich and powerful enough to do so.”

