

July 8, 2003

HEARTBREAK IN SINGAPORE

How sad. The news was heartbreaking as CNN beat its competitors this morning, with word that the Iranian Twins Laleh and Ladan Bijani, joined at birth twenty nine years ago, did not survive a complicated surgical procedure in Singapore to separate them. CNN's Dr Gupta likened the operation to cutting a piece of paper along its edge. Of course it is the unusual nature of the case and the constantly repeated video of the unusual duo that made the story a must-carry. The health and well-being of people in Iran or medical practices at Singapore rarely make the news.

In another part of the world, political surgery to separate the Blair-Bush twins is no more successful. Blair gave another masterful performance worthy of the Oxford Union before Parliament, when he expressed his faith that the missing WMD's will be found (he said systems, not weapons per se) and denied he had misled anyone. In the US, The New York Times is reporting that the White House is fessing up to one innaccuracy. David Sanger reports "Bush Claim on Iraq Had Flawed Origin, White House Says: The president relied on incomplete and perhaps inaccurate information when he said Iraq had tried to buy uranium from Africa."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/08/international/worldspecial/08PREX.html?th>

BRITS BLAST BLAIR, AMERICANS LOVE THAT ACCENT

THERE is growing criticism in Britain that the leaders of the US and the UK are joined at the hip: George Monbiot's piece today in the Guardian gives you the flavor of views I will be exposed to more during a visit later this week to London. "The prediction was not hard to make. If Britain kept supporting the US government as it trampled the sovereignty of other nations, before long it would come to threaten our own. But few guessed that this would happen so soon.

"Long ago, Britain informally surrendered much of its determination of foreign policy to the United States. We have sent our soldiers to die for that country in two recent wars, and our politicians to lie for it. But now the British government is going much further. It is ceding control to the US over two of the principal instruments of national self-determination: judicial authority and military policy. The mystery is not that this is happening. The mystery is that those who have sought to persuade us that they are the guardians of national sovereignty are either failing to respond, or demanding only that Britain becomes the doormat on which the US government can wipe its bloodstained boots."

His column comes on the heels of this report in Sunday's Observer: "The two British terrorist suspects facing a secret US military tribunal in Guan-

tanamo Bay will be given a choice: plead guilty and accept a 20-year prison sentence, or be executed if found guilty. American legal sources close to the process said that the prisoners' dilemma was intended to encourage maximum 'co-operation.' ”

ANGLOPHILIA STRIKES AGAIN

ODDLY enough as critical opinion in Britain turns against Blair, respectable opinion-makers in the US prefer him as a leader to what we've got. Nicholas Kristof gives voice to this Anglophilia on Times op-ed page today: "Everywhere I go in Britain, people dismiss Mr. Blair as President Bush's poodle. Mr. Blair's Labor Party has fallen behind the Conservatives in the latest poll, for only the second time in 11 years. 'The Iraq critics think that the prime minister has betrayed his country to a Texas gunslinger,' William Rees-Mogg noted in The Times of London.

"So it'll sound foolish when I suggest that President Bush should study Mr. Blair and learn a few things. But on the other hand, everybody likes Mr. Blair but the Brits."

In the ongoing battle in Britain about the role of the media, The Guardian reports, "The BBC director general Greg Dyke today reiterated his refusal to apologize to the government over the Iraq story that brought the corporation into conflict with the government and urged Blair spin-doctor Alastair Campbell to bury the hatchet. He said government and media had different roles and that both sides should respect each other's rights to go about their jobs as they saw fit."

WHO LOOTED WHAT?

AND once again we have to turn to a newspaper

in Iraq to find out about what American soldiers did in Iraq, Simon Robinson reports in The Times as relayed by Undernews:

"Much has been written about how Iraqis complicated the task of rebuilding their country by looting it after Saddam Hussein's regime fell. In the case of the international airport outside Baghdad, however, the theft and vandalism were conducted largely by victorious American troops, according to U.S. officials, Iraqi Airways staff members and other airport workers. The troops, they say, stole duty-free items, needlessly shot up the airport and trashed five serviceable Boeing airplanes.

"A boardroom table that Welsh and Iraqi civil aviation authority officials sat around in early May was, a week later, a pile of glass and splintered wood. Terminal windows were smashed, and almost every door in the building was broken, says Welsh. A Time photographer who flew out of the airport on April 12 saw wrecked furniture and English-language graffiti throughout the airport office building as well as a sign warning that soldiers caught vandalizing or looting would be court-martialed. "There was no chance this was done by Iraqis, before the airport fell, says a senior Pentagon official."

OIL IS BEING STOLEN

THE looting of the airport was nada compared to what may be happening in the oilfields. John Cassidy writes about this in The New Yorker, He discussed his findings with the magazine's Amy Davidson:

"As far as the oil industry is concerned, the instability has had a major impact. Back in April, on the day Baghdad fell, Vice-President Dick Cheney said that Iraq oil production could reach three

million barrels a day by the end of the year. Three months later, production is still stuck below one million barrels a day, and the main reason is the rampant looting and disorder that struck the industry in the weeks after the war ended. Even now, pipelines are being blown up, plants are being looted, and oil is being stolen.

“Question: One question that you bring up in your piece is whether Iraq’s oil industry ought to be privatized. Obviously, privatization is a larger and quite controversial issue, related to that of globalization. Is Iraq likely to become a focal point for that debate?”

“The Bush Administration is not revealing what, if anything, it plans to do with the Iraqi oil industry in the long term. All it will say is that the future Iraqi government will make the decisions. However, some people in Washington are pushing for privatization. Earlier this year, a couple of economists from the Heritage Foundation published a paper advocating the splitting up of the Iraqi oil industry, followed by a stock-market flotation, along Russian lines.”

HEADLESS BODY IN BAGHDAD BAR

FINAL and ominous story from Liberated Iraq: Reuters reports, “The gruesome death of an Iraqi man whose head was shot off inflamed anti-American rage in the volatile town of Ramadi on Monday after a night of armed attacks which wounded four U.S. troops. Several Iraqis gathered around his bullet ridden car, where a piece of skull lay among the shattered windshield glass on the floorboard.

“Another crowd walked past pools of blood at Ramadi General Hospital and watched a doctor pull plastic sheeting off his corpse that was punc-

tured by bullets they said were fired by U.S. troops occupying the town, around 100 km (60 miles) west of Baghdad. “You will see what will happen to the Americans now. You will see what we will do to them,” hospital administrator Taha Hussein told Reuters.” Yikes. [Still, there is still the unanswered question: What really happened?]

THE RUMOR MILL

AT the same time AP reports that “Lies and half-truths – readily believed by a nation of people who learned long ago to be skeptical of rulers’ motives – are complicating America’s mission in Iraq, fueling anti-U.S. sentiment as troops struggle to quell a growing uprising.” His story documents the proliferation of propaganda, including reports that “Zionists are spreading drugs and prostitution. The Assaah newspaper on Saturday claimed that the Israeli government ordered the modification of its export laws to flood Iraqi markets with Israeli goods. The paper urged Iraqis to carefully check Taiwanese or Chinese-made appliances for hidden Stars of David.”

A LIGHT UNTO THE HEATHENS

THANKS to the President’s visit to Africa, that continent is getting more prime-time news attention. The same thing happened when earlier presidents visited. “The visit will be short, but the problems are deep,” intoned a BBC World report. There were protests in Senegal last week and more are expected in South Africa. President Bush lands at an airforce base outside Pretoria (once a showplace of the old regime. I know. I have been there.)

“Is this for real, or is this tourism?” asked Chester Crocker, who handled African affairs for President Reagan. The Mail and Guardian

reports: “George Bush is to arrive at Waterkloof Air Force base outside Pretoria late on Tuesday night for a brief official visit to South Africa. He will be accompanied by his Secretary of State Colin Powell and Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Walter Kansteiner.” Not sure how much of South Africa he will see or wants to see. Former President Nelson Mandela earlier said he refused to see or talk to Bush. He is Britain, where I expect to see him at an event on Friday.

AT LAST: SAVAGE SEVERED

IN our media news, a major development: “Michael Savage’s MSNBC show, *The Savage Nation*, was cancelled because of homophobic remarks made by the host on the July 5 edition of the show, according to an Associated Press (AP) report. Those comments – labeling a caller ‘a sodomite’ and telling him to ‘get AIDS and die.’ MSNBC spokesperson Jeremy Gaines told AP, ‘His comments were extremely inappropriate and the decision was an easy one.’”

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) reports: “Over the past five months, FAIR activists have written more than 2,000 individual letters to MSNBC expressing their concerns about Savage’s record of bigotry and hate, and criticizing the network for hiring a host who routinely traffics in slurs while firing host Phil Donahue over his anti-war views. Savage can still be heard on some 300 radio stations across the country.”

MSNBC remains a pit of internal recrimination. This morning Don Imus blasted fellow MSNBCer and ex-Judge, ex CNN, ex ABC’s Catherine Crier as “awful.”

ISRAEL WANTS AUSSIE BAN

THE Australian press reports that “the Israeli

government will lobby Australia’s national broadcaster to ditch plans to screen a controversial BBC documentary on the Jewish state. The program, *Israel’s Secret Weapon*, asserts that Israel has used nerve gas against Palestinians and possesses an arsenal of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. ABC Television said the program would be screened but it had not yet been scheduled.”

A FLAG IN THE FACE

A MEMBER of the Armed Forces wrote to challenge my account of the American flag being a propaganda stunt because the flag was reported to have come originally from the World Trade Center site and just happened to be in Iraq the day the statue was toppled. He writes to correct me about a column skeptical about whether New York corporal Chin acted alone:

“I know Cpl Chin’s tank commander personally. I have spoken to him at length about the incident. The symbol of putting that particular flag up there was a personal one and much, much less about national ‘pay-back.’ If you research the incident, you will find many, many articles and personal interviews that will attest to that. In Cpl Chin’s own words ‘We took it (the American flag) down after a brief moment and put their flag up to symbolize that we were here to free their country and give it back to the people.’

“Lieutenant McLaughlin, the Marine who carried that flag from the Pentagon to Iraq, was a General’s aide at the Pentagon on 9-11. He was given the flag and later transferred to 1st Tank Battalion. (1st Tank BN was attached to 3rd Bn 4th Marines, that is why most of the articles say 3-4 instead of 1st Tanks.) The flag incident was about the USA liberating the Iraqi people and then returning the country to them, liberated. It was

never about 'pay-back.' The Pay-back comes in other forms, but that is another story.

"Also, Here is one article explaining the incident: <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/GMA/Prime-time/Iraq030410USFlagStatue.html>

KINDNESS IS THREATENING

FINALLY word has reached me from folks who work with Body Shop founder Anita Roddick that a new book of her on kindness was deemed a "threat to security in the great state of Loosiana.

"Only in America, in this period of cynical paranoia and repression of civil liberties could a 'peace officer' deem a book about the power of kindness to be a threat to a security," said Dame Anita Roddick, upon learning that a copy of her new book

"A Revolution in Kindness," that she had sent to a prisoner inside Angola Prison in Louisiana had been rejected on ostensible security grounds. (Angola prison was the subject of "The Farm," a documentary film.)

"The copy of "A Revolution in Kindness" was intended for an inmate named Herman Wallace, who contributed an essay to the book. Wallace is one of the inmates known as the Angola Three, who have been in solitary confinement for 31 years because they were civil rights activists determined to improve conditions in what was considered the 'bloodiest prison in America' in the early 1970s. Roddick has been campaigning for their freedom since 2000."

For more: <http://www.AnitaRoddick.com>.

