

June 11, 2003

PUKING OR REBUKING?

Rebukes” is one of those New York Times words, referring to a mild reprimand, nothing that needs to have much attention paid to it. As in:

“Bush Rebukes Israel for Attack in Gaza

“By STEVEN R. WEISMAN

“The president asserted that Israel’s attempt to kill a Palestinian militant leader undermined recent Mideast peace efforts.”

As Sharon continues to be Sharon, whatever hope for a Middle East deal that even I, and far better informed critics, hesitantly hoped for unravels. Now the target for the Palestinians will be Abu Mazin – no doubt for taking Washington’s word that it will press Israel to restrain their aggressive tit-for-tat responses. With more funerals to preside over, and Hamas outraged by the attempted assassination of one of its political (not military leaders), as well as civilians who happened to be in the way, more violence is assured.

The Palestine Monitor reported some of the details that were largely glossed over in the US press: “One of the additional missiles fired hit a Palestinian medical relief clinic (destroying it partially), as well as a center for the disabled, in addition to wounding medical worker Yassir Siyam. Medical sources report 27 Palestinians were wounded in the attack, seven of whom remain in serious condition.

“This brings to 225 the total number of people killed since September 2000 in such extra-judicial executions or assassinations, 98 of who were

bystanders or unintended victims, including 16 women and 27 children.”

I wouldn’t be surprised if Sharon himself will now be targeted, although the Tank commander is well defended by a phalanx of tank-like security. Violence as we know only begets . . . that’s right . . . VIOLENCE!!

BUSH: “I SAVED HIS ASSS”

PRESIDENT BUSH’S unusual “rebuke” has a back story to it that the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz reported the other day, namely that Bush told a group of Israel lobbyists that “I saved his ass” – his referring to Sharon’s. He told them the war in Iraq was fought to protect Israel. Israel is now rushing “intelligence” information to Washington to try to convince the President that they were right to do what they did. After all, they were combating “terrorists.”

Meanwhile, BBC reports “A Belgian court has ruled that a case brought against an Israeli general for crimes against humanity can go ahead: “Twenty-three survivors of the 1982 massacres at Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon filed the lawsuit against General Amos Yaron, responsible at the time for the Beirut sector of the Israeli defence ministry. The so-called “universal competence” law, under which the case was brought, allows Belgian courts to prosecute people with no direct link to Belgium, for crimes with no direct link.”

OLIVER STONE REPORTS

I WAS surprised last night to find a documentary on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on HBO 2. It was directed by Oliver Stone, starring Oliver Stone. A week earlier I had queried HBO about a film on the media coverage of the Iraq War, and was told NFU – “Not for U.S.” But Hollywood film makers or those who use Hollywood techniques have exceptions made for them. I didn’t see the whole film but what I did see was pretty dramatic with lots of Stone-style cross-cutting and MTV effects. He certainly gained access to all the players. An earlier doc of his, *Commandante*, pitted Oliver against Castro and was, as I reported at the time, shown at the Sundance Film festival. It’s been reported that HBO was slated to run that too, but pulled it at the last minute after political pressure was heard. The Channel ran an anti-Castro doc instead.

More than a decade ago, I worked with Oliver, directing a documentary based on his film *JFK*. Ours was a look at the issues in the film and was called *BEYOND JFK*. At that time, Oliver was a dramatist making movies, and we were the documentary filmmakers. He was into fiction and we were, as journalists, into “faction.” Now he has moved over into a form of journalism and we can’t find work. Such is life under the big tent where celebrities sell and “names” prevail. (Just look at Hillary’s “mediathon.”) I hope to see the whole film as well as other films on the conflict at the Human Rights Film Festival this weekend.

ROSE PUSHES CHALABI TO PUSH WASHINGTON

AHMAD CHALABI, the Iraqi that most Secretaries of Defense want to see running Iraq, was on the Charlie Rose show last night and something

extraordinary happened. Charlie actually was assertive and pressed him, and Chalabi was almost candid. If there was a headline, it was “U.S. Wins (what may or may not have been) a war but loses what may or may not be a peace.” The Iraqi National Congress leader tried to be diplomatic but he lambasted the way the US failed to protect Iraqi resources after its military “victory” and refusal to launch a political process to turn the country back over to its people. If read between the lines properly, he is a an angry and betrayed man who faults US policymakers as idiots who had a war plan but no occupation plan, and are screwing up royally. Former US Ambassador Peter Galbraith was equally dismissive on *Nightline*, as more and more media outlets finally discover the extent of the disaster in Iraq.

Chalabi faulted journalists – get this-for being too “anti-war” and for giving too negative a view. He did like and praise New York Times war booster Judith Miller, who he says provided the President with much of the “evidence” he cited during his first speech at the UN. He admits that he arranged to get her the info she reported.

THE MESS IN BAGHDAD

CNN’S parent company used to be run by man named Gerald Levin. The news network once had a bureau chief named Jerry Levin, “who was kidnapped in Beirut in the ‘80s and held hostage for 7 months before he escaped. Jerry Levin is currently in Baghdad with the Christian Peacemaker Teams.”

He confirms what Chalabi himself admits: “Professionals, adept at waging war and promoting the proposition that it is an appropriate means for establishing peace, can be counted on to usually promise that peace will follow in war’s wake. But

once again in Iraq, those professionals are proving how woefully incompetent they are when it comes to waging the peace, which they insist will follow. Street protests and worse continue: tangible demonstrations of Iraqi exasperation and/or impatience with the pace of the occupation's restoration of such vital institutions as: security, education, power, fuel, sanitation, and health."

"As a result I now not only worry about Iraqis caught in the escalating violence, I also worry about the many conscience-stricken, mom-and-apple-pie young GIs we encountered in Baghdad. Many, if not all of them, are now in danger of being picked off day by day, one-by-one and two-by-two by an apparently rising number of Iraqis disillusioned by an occupation that they had been led to believe would be liberating. So any day now we may have to face the fact that the number of post-Bush "Mission Accomplished" declared deaths among allied soldiers is going to eclipse the number of those who died during the invasion."

BLIX LASHES OUT AT "BASTARDS"

NOW Hans Blix, the hapless UN inspector is finally speaking out in less diplomatic language as his UN term comes to an end at month's end. The Guardian sat down with him:

"Hans Blix, the UN chief weapons inspector, lashed out last night at the 'bastards' who have tried to undermine him throughout the three years he has held his high-profile post.

"In an extraordinary departure from the diplomatic language with which he has come to be associated, Blix assailed his critics in both Washington and Iraq.

"Speaking exclusively to the Guardian from his 31st floor office at the UN in New York, Blix said:

"I have my detractors in Washington. There are bastards who spread things around, of course, who planted nasty things in the media. Not that I cared very much. It was like a mosquito bite in the evening that is there in the morning, an irritant."

"In a wide-ranging interview Blix, who retires in three weeks' time, accused:

"The Bush administration of leaning on his inspectors to produce more damning language in their reports;

"Some elements" of the Pentagon of being behind a smear campaign against him; and "Washington of regarding the UN as an "alien power" which they hoped would sink into the East river."

MEDIA MAN INDICTS MEDIA

OF course, media institutions must be faulted for their failure to puncture all the deceptive stories that have been rising like sewer gas from Foggy Bottom in Washington. Bill Gallagher who works as a TV reporter in Detroit fears this situation will get worse in piece in a newspaper in Niagara Falls.

"The administration already enjoys the enthusiastic support and jingoistic rhetoric of the cable news networks, the baby Pravdas. Now a little more consolidation and ownership of stations can't hurt, or so the administration's thinking goes.

"We get our message out and our friends in the corporate media couldn't be happier. The hell with the public. They won't notice anyway."

But San Francisco Gate columnist Mark Mumford notices. "The charming pro-corporate FCC vote enthusiastically slaps all-American ideas of diversity and free speech and open-minded dialogue and dissent, and does everything to promote ideas of more and more benumbed media

voices owned by fewer and fewer companies that couldn't care one whit about anything but profit and control and further consolidation of power."

NEW YORK TIMES DEBATE CONTINUES

SPEAKING of media, I was pleased to find Cynthia Cotts in the Village Voice using language very similar to my own in reference to the New York Times. I spoke of a "dictatorship on West 43rd Street" and referred to the toppling of NY Times editors Raines and Boyd as the result of a newsroom rebellion. Cotts writes:

"Let this be a lesson for editors everywhere: It doesn't pay to brutalize your workforce.

"Many factors played a role in Raines's downfall, but in the end, it was not Jayson Blair, not Rick Bragg, not the late-night jokes, but the editor's own actions that determined his fate. His top-down management style (detailed in this column first and everywhere last week) poisoned the newsroom and hampered many reporters and editors from doing their best work. All executives tend to downplay the importance of staff morale, and Sulzberger was no exception, until he met with open rebellion."

THE PAPER'S "INSULAR CLOSED CULTURE"

SIDNEY SCHANBERG, the Pulitzer Prize winner and former Times Columnist, is indicting the Times unwillingness to look at itself in the Voice this week. (Schanberg's story on Cambodia and Polpot's campaign of genocide was at the center of the movie, *The Killing Fields*). He writes in part:

"Let it suffice to say that one attribute of the Times I never fully appreciated was its insular,

often closed culture, where dissent from a staff member was rarely welcome, even when it was entirely in-house and private. To criticize the paper in public was simply unthinkable, a capital crime. In my Op-Ed columns, I chose occasionally to disagree-by-inference, not naming the Times—with some of the paper's editorial positions and also with the newsroom's failure to cover certain stories about sacred cows and other controversial subjects. In mid-1985, after four years, the column was abruptly "discontinued." I was asked to take another writing job, a good one, but I thought it best to leave.

"Though unhappy at the time, I understood the paper's position. I was, in the publisher's eyes, a child of the Times family who had broken one of the family rules. I had criticized the paper in public. I argued that self-examination was healthy for the paper. I didn't prevail."

IS THE FRENCH PRESS NEXT?

THE European Journalism Center reports that French newspapers are also being tinged by scandal. They quote from a piece in the Financial Times: "In the wake of Howell Raines's exit as editor of the New York Times, it might seem that French newspaper executives have nerves of steel. The editors of three of the country's most powerful newspapers are in the process of facing down accusations that media watchers say could be more damaging to their reputations than the reporting scandal that prompted Mr. Raines to hand in his resignation last week. For example, it was revealed last week that Jean de Belot, editor of *Le Figaro*, France's main centre-right newspaper, had been put under formal investigation for possible insider trading offences."

GERMANY DISAPPEARS FROM VIEW

THE German-based international media monitoring firm Media Tenor reports that “From January to April 2003, Gerhard Schröder and Germany did not appear on TV news programs in the U.S. In South Africa, there were reports from Germany and France, but they did not feature Schröder or Chirac. In the U.S., the disproportionate amount of reports on the war against Iraq led the news programs to largely neglect most other countries. Most notably, there was a curious lack of information concerning Europe in general.”

This is very interesting in light of some documents excerpted on a blogspot web site that said it had received “over 1,500 pages of memos from corporate offices of his network in New York to the head of their television news division. These memos contain a multitude of instructions concerning the presentation of national and international news.”

One of the documents seems to suggest that Germany was not the only country deliberately “disappeared from the news.”

“(Feb 10) It is not permitted at this point to use or refer to any film clips, stills or articles emanating from any French source whatsoever.”

IT'S IN THE BOOK

I WILL be running some of these excerpts in my new book, “Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception,” about the coverage of the Iraq War. I hope to get the book back from the publisher, Coldtype.net, today. More on its availability tomorrow.

MOYERS ON THE HUSTINGS

BILL MOYERS, who has already announced his impending retirement, is now speaking out politically from “pulpits” other than his own TV show. He was at the conference last weekend put on by the Campaign for America’s Future in Washington. I received a report on his “call to arms:”

“Bill Moyers delivered a call to arms against “government of, by and for the ruling corporate class.” Condemning “the unholy alliance between government and wealth” and the compassionate conservative spin that tries to make “the rape of America sound like a consensual date,” Moyers charged that “right-wing wrecking crews” assembled by the Bush Administration and its Congressional allies were out to bankrupt government. Then, he said, they would privatize public services in order to enrich the corporate interests that fund campaigns and provide golden parachutes to pliable politicians. If unchecked, Moyers warned, the result of these machinations will be the dismantling of “every last brick of the social contract.” “I think this is a deliberate, intentional destruction of the United States of America,” said Moyers, as he called for the progressives gathered in Washington – and for their allies across the United States – to organize.”

Moyers’ son runs Tom Paine.com. It reports, “The FOX News Web site has no (count ‘em, zero) stories on their front page about the administration’s claims on WMD. However the “We report. You decide” network does provide this helpful survey, asking readers if they believe Iraq had a weapons program. Responders may answer Yes, and evidence will be found; No, I don’t think it did; or Not sure. “We wanted to “decide,” but we

couldn't find the button for Yes—but not when the United States invaded Iraq. Come on. No one has ever denied that Iraq had a weapons program. The question is, what did Saddam do after 1998 when the U.N. inspectors left? Did Iraq have the thousands of tons of weapons that Bush claimed it did? Most importantly, did Bush have any reason to believe it did – or were intelligence reports cooked? “

CHINA CONTROLS INTERNET CAFES

JULIANA LIU of Reuters reports from China that the government there is consolidating all of

its internet cafes. “China said on Tuesday it had given licenses to 10 local firms to open Internet cafe chains, a move analysts said was designed to squeeze out smaller players and tighten control of sensitive political information. Most of the franchise licenses were given to state-owned companies such as China United Telecommunications Corp, parent of China Unicom Ltd; Great Wall Broadband Network Service Co Ltd; or those affiliated with the Ministry of Culture.

“We aim to boost the Internet cafe business by encouraging chain operations,” Liu Qiang, an official at the ministry’s Internet culture division, told Reuters. “It helps to standardize the business.”

