

June 12, 2003

WEAR YOUR BODY ARMOR

It's funny what the brain remembers even as I forget appointments or even dates from time to time. Somewhere back in there, buried in the graying matter, is a line from American patriot Patrick Henry's famous oration in the days before the American Revolution. I memorized the words during the last century for what had been called then a "declamation" contest. It took place in ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (PS 95 in Da Bronx). "Gentlemen may call for peace, peace," said this Virginia landowner. "But there is no peace. The war has actually begun."

SECURITY IN SPARTA

IN the Middle East that war never ended with the "Sharonistas" like the character Ahab in Melville's Moby Dick vowing to stomp out all terrorists which signals the end of the great Bush peace offensive. You ask, "Didn't they know what would happen when they tried to kill a top Hamas leader?" Answer: Of course, they knew. In one sense, "both sides" (and yes, there are more than two but most go unreported) are locked in this deadly embrace. Violence is functional for them. It serves all their goals. It keeps Israel as a Sparta state committed to the status quo. It gives the Islamicists a rationale for continuing their war against Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Every one is happy. Except the victims, of course.

War resumes in Iraq as the US seems to be finally acknowledging the presence of armed resistance, a reality that journalists like Robert

Fisk are reporting (discussing just yesterday on the Democracy Now radio show with Amy Goodman). Reports today's New York Times: "4,000 GIs Circle a Hussein Bastion to Foil Attacks: "Aimed at detaining Saddam Hussein loyalists, American forces are carrying out their largest single military operation in Iraq since the end of major fighting."

IRAQ: WAR IS BACK

THE full extent of the attacks on US soldiers is not being reported. But a private security service called Centurion RAS is keeping tabs for its clients. "Very reliable and specific intelligence indicates the high likelihood of an impending major attack against Coalition forces and/or Westerners within Baghdad.

"Clients have been advised to keep their body armor and helmets in their rooms at night. These are to be worn as protection against falling debris and protruding obstacles should evacuation of the building become necessary.

"Clients have been advised to increase their personal security awareness levels with particular emphasis on not hanging around in the main lobby area when entering and exiting the hotel.

"The pattern has shown a daily increase rising from 4 - 8 - 11 - 12 - 14 - 18- up to a new level yesterday of 26 separate attacks.

"The attacks were initially seen as being individual sporadic isolated incidents. However there are suggestions now that the attacks appear to be

orchestrated and organized. It is certainly very apparent that the US military now appears more tense and alert.”

HOW MANY CIVILIANS DIED?

US media organizations are finally focusing on getting reliable information on the extent of civilian casualties. The Associated Press report: “At least 3,240 civilian deaths were recorded by hospitals in Iraq as a result of the recent war. Associated Press reporters visited 60 of the country’s largest hospitals to review those records.”

Increasingly, it is being noted that the media has become part of the problem. Ross Baker who writes for Columbia Journalism Review reports: The growing scandal over the Bush Administration’s manipulation of intelligence data on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction focuses on the role of the White House. But it doesn’t devote proper attention to the role of the US media in the propaganda effort that misled the world.

“Probably the central character in that effort was The New York Times’s Judith Miller, perhaps the world’s leading journalistic “specialist” in covering chemical and biological weapons threats. Miller has recently come under criticism within the US journalistic community for seemingly cooperating in the ongoing disinformation program by passing along unfounded Pentagon claims about the reasons behind its decision to go to war.”

PILGER: “IT WAS ALL A CHARADE”

OVER in England, anti-war journalist John Pilger is on fire about what he calls a calls “a charade” in London’s Daily Mirror: “Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector, has spoken this truth: the

invasion of Iraq was planned long ago, he said, and that the issue of weapons rested largely on “fabricated evidence.” Blair has made fools not so much of the British people, most of whom were and are on to him, but of respectable journalists and broadcasters who channeled and amplified his black propaganda as headlines and lead items on BBC news bulletins. They cried wolf for him. They gave him every benefit of the doubt, and so minimised his culpability and allowed him to set much of the news agenda.

“What is different now is that the truth is winning through. This week, publication of an extraordinary map left little doubt that the British military had plastered much of Iraq with cluster bombs, many of which almost certainly have failed to detonate on impact. They usually wait for children to pick them up, then they explode, as in Kosovo and Afghanistan.”

ICE PICK ASIDE

NYU’S Global Beat passes on this item: “from Canada’s National Post, “a number of pundits and neo-con strategists informally advising the administration on the Middle East were influenced early on by Leon Trotsky’s political insights. Neo-cons and Trotskyites share a recognition of the need to take a proactive and occasionally unpopular position, the ability to anticipate rather than react, and the moral courage to stand apart from liberal left opinion when liberal left opinion acts like a mob.” (Jeet Heer in the National Post, June 7, 2003)

To keep up morale among US troops, PR Watch reports that the army is pushing patriotism to its forces: “The US army has launched a glossy patriotic magazine to rally its 3rd Infantry Division, whose troops face hostile action in the badlands of western Iraq a full two months after Saddam

Hussein's ouster," Agence France-Press reports. "Called the 'Liberator', the 16-page in-house publication carries rousing reports from the field to win over homesick troops who might be doubting the rationale for the US presence more than six months after they first arrived in Kuwait. Perhaps not surprisingly, the publication lacks any Iraqi voices or any criticism of US forces."

UNDERPLAYED STORIES

FINALLY some news out of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Liberia is being reported in the US media. But the full extent of US military help to Indonesia is missing. Foreign Policy in Focus reports, "Far from the spotlight and far from Baghdad, another shock-and-awe campaign is under way. On May 19th, Indonesia launched a military campaign to "strike and paralyze" a small band of separatist rebels in the Aceh province. In a made-for-TV photo op, 458 soldiers parachuted onto the island from six C-130 Hercules transport aircraft manufactured by Lockheed Martin, the United States' largest defense contractor. As many as 40,000 Indonesian troops and a police force of 10,000 followed close behind, backed up by warships, fighter planes, and other high-tech military equipment, declaring war on 5,000 separatist guerillas armed with automatic weapons."

Just as the World Health Organization is reporting that there are no new SARS cases in China, and that China is beating back the deadly disease, China's rulers have found someone new to blame besides themselves: "China's official news agency has accused the banned spiritual group Falun Gong of trying to spread the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus in China. The agency said that some Falun Gong members had called for sending people to hospitals treating

SARS patients, so that they would get infected with the virus and help spread the epidemic around the country." Falun Gong, of course, denies this totally.

MEDIA NEWS AND THE MEDIA IN THE NEWS

THERE is a media angle to many news stories even when you don't notice them at first. The Media Guardian reports: "Jerry Springer has launched a website to test opinion about a possible bid for the US senate." In another story, the man accused of bombing that night club in Bali says he did it because foreigners have taken over late night TV.

The media beast seems to be inspiring all sorts of complaints and even fantasies. Media critic Matt Taibbi of New York Press is fantasizing in another direction – imagining the creation of the Guillotine Channel to stage live executions of right-wingers on the tube. Here's a snippet:

"With the signatures collected, Taibbi launched the Guillotine Channel. For the premiere, Taibbi assigned ten crack Russian mobster employees to arrest Fox News chief Roger Ailes, drive him to the TGC studios in Burbank and, using a restored 18th-century French guillotine, chop off his head on live television. The privilege of releasing the rope was awarded to a Hispanic single mother in Los Angeles, whose application was chosen via a televised lottery. Due to the buyout contract, the entire arrangement was completely legal.

"The channel was an overnight success. Advance response for the second televised event was so enormous that Taibbi arranged to have the beheading of aging talk-show legend Bill O'Reilly aired on a pay-per-view basis. Some 165 million Americans paid \$119 to watch the historic broad-

cast, which featured uproarious live commentary by prisoners at the super-max prison facility in Wallens Ridge, VA.”

“NEWSCAST TO NOWHERE”

SPEAKING of bizarre channels, ABC News reports on the ‘newscast to nowhere.’ “Fifty-five reporters, editors, and producers – all U.S. government employees – work seven days a week in a television newsroom in Miami. Each day they earnestly assemble, record, and broadcast 4 hours of news and information programming in Spanish.

“And no ever one sees it.

The intended audience is the people of Cuba.

“Because from the beginning, the Castro government has successfully blocked the TV Martí signal. It costs the Cuban government just pennies a day to operate the jamming antennas that are strategically perched on top of Havana’s highest buildings.

“It costs U.S. taxpayers almost \$10 million a year – more than \$100 million since TV Martí began – to keep broadcasting TV Martí’s anti-Castro invective into the ether.

GARBAGE

THE Boston Globe is reporting that FCC chairman “dismisses as “garbage” claims that Americans’ interests went unheard when the FCC approved changes allowing for more media consolidation.”

The New York Post’s sources report that Bill Keller, a former New York Times managing editor, is “the overwhelming favorite of the newsroom” to take the top editor job at the paper. The New York Observer reports: “There are the names, but they are conventional wisdom names: former

Times managing editor and current op-ed columnist Bill Keller, who was passed over for the job when Mr. Raines was chosen; Boston Globe editor Marty Baron; former Timesman and current Los Angeles Times editor Dean Baquet.

“Mr. Sulzberger, for his part, said he’d pick someone who was, first, “a great journalist;” and second, “someone who can manage a complex newsroom,” now providing content for the local and national editions of The Times, a Web site, a cable television channel and The International Herald Tribune.”

STRIPPING PULITZER PRIZES

RE The Times: I was called yesterday by Radio Free Europe to comment on reports that the Pulitzer prize committee is considering revoking a prize given in 1932 to Times reporter Walter Duranty. Behind the campaign is a letter-writing campaign in the Ukrainian community which say Duranty failed to report on a famine caused by Stalinist policies. One letter that was circulated to be sent to the Pulitzer people contends: “In his reports, Duranty downplayed the impact of food shortages in Ukraine or simply denied that there was a famine, although he visited areas afflicted by famine in 1933. While other Western reporters reported on the famine conditions as best they could (due to Soviet censorship and restrictions on visits to famine areas), Duranty acted more like a spokesperson for the Soviet government than an independent reporter for a Western newspaper.”

Problem is that when it comes to apologizing for or ignoring crimes by governments many a reporter today could be equally faulted.

JIM HIGHTOWER DISSECTS TIMES HEADLINES

FINAL note on the Times, humorist Jim Hightower has out-"onioned" The Onion with his latest satirical dispatch: "Amid the turmoil sparked by fraud scandals involving Jayson Blair and other staff writers, the Times is reviewing all editorial content from the past several years.

"Instituting a policy of full disclosure, Interim Executive Editor Joseph Lelyveld today ordered the retraction of false and misleading headlines as soon as they are discovered. The inventory of falsehoods, expected to reach mammoth proportions, so far includes:

"Compassionate Conservative Candidate Bush: A Uniter, Not A Divider"

"Candidate Bush Supports Environmental Legislation"

"Bush Won't Touch Social Security Surplus Under Any Condition"

"George W. Bush Elected"

"Bush To Be President Of All The People," etc etc.

BOOK BUSINESS

"I HAD one letter saying enough already on Hillary's new book. Dan Kennedy called my attention to Michiko Kakutani's review in yesterday's New York Times. "A highlight: 'Overall the book has the over-processed taste of a stump speech, the calculated polish of a string of anecdotes to be delivered on a television chat show.'"

I don't think my new book on the Iraq War coverage will represent any competition but "Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception: How the media failed to cover the Iraq War" is done. It is available only on a PDF feed. We are inviting Media Channel readers to send in a donation of \$50 and we will send it to you. For \$100, you will get that book, as well as MEDIA WARS and the "sound-track" CD. Check payable to The Global Center, 575 Eighth Avenue, New York New York 10018. Donations can also be made online through PayPal (See home page) but you will have to send me an email and tell me where to send the book. Write: dissector@mediachannel.org. The book sells for \$15.95. – News Dissector Danny Schechter writes a daily weblog on media coverage for Mediachannel.org. His latest book is "MediaWars: News at a Time of Terror (Rowman & Littlefield). Share your comments by writing: dissector@mediachannel.org

