

June 13, 2003

THE PAST IS NEVER PAST

About history, it has been said: The past is never really past. It lives on in almost every news story that can only be understood when the context is presented – as it most often is not.

Today, we awake to memorial tributes on CNN to Gregory Peck, whose political stands are being glossed over. I met him when he was among those welcoming Nelson Mandela to Los Angeles in 1990.

We are also saying goodbye to TV news icon David Brinkley, whose commercial interests as the spokesperson in later life to ADM (one of the world's largest agro multi-nationals) were avoided by my old pal Jeff Greenfield, with whom I watched Brinkley report a political convention in the days that political conventions were considered news events, not staged spectacles. Jeff was beside himself, gushing over Brinkley's "conclusion" as a writer. I was once talked to him about a job on the News Magazine he hosted on NBC before the network axed him. Thankfully, I chose to stay with 20/20. It was soon cancelled. The exec who recruited me left working for the media to reporting on it for Wall Street.

And then, on BBC at least, we have the spectacle of riots in Belgrade after supporters of a former military muscle man who bombed Vukovar in Croatia was arrested, finally, for war crimes. I didn't even see that story on the US networks, which never really covered Serbia's war crimes until very late in the day as the Brits say. Not mentioned

there was the deteriorating press freedom situation in that country. The Committee to Protect Journalists notes: "we are concerned about government officials' continued use of verbal threats, politicized lawsuits, and state censorship to harass journalists and silence news outlets because of reporting that criticizes government policies."

And more history as a current reality: The Mail and Guardian reports that, "The apartheid-era South African Military Intelligence service had links with the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

<http://www.mg.co.za/Content/l3.asp?a=59&o=22238>

Ah, but that is all history. Right. Old News (rarely in the news). Right.

SHREDDING THE ROAD MAP

CLICK over to CNN and Fox and they are chattering away about the peace plan in the Middle East without acknowledging what seems obvious: it is dead. But why? Suicide bombings you say. Nasty terrorist attacks by Hamas. That's how it is played here. On more even-handed media, there is a realization that the violence was predictable if not anticipated or provoked (depending on your point of view) by Israel.

What we see, and usually all we see, is the bloody aftermath of one incident or another – a bus blown up, a helicopter assassination in retaliation. Everyone dancing in the "quartet" or jawboning as in "the President worked the phones"

knows that the Palestinian Authority lacks the capacity to restrain Hamas since its own infrastructure was destroyed by Israel and both are competing factions. The “government” of the Palestinians is not. And yet the charade continues that it is not acting – as if it could. As for Israel, it has an agenda, a plan, and a strategy which is increasingly obvious.

For the background, check out Edward Sheehan’s well-reported piece in the New York Review of Books on the “Road Map & The Fence.” Fence is a misnomer. It is higher than the Berlin Wall. It will be 700 kilometers long and 25 feet high. Wanna know the feelings of the people being walled in or out (depending again on your point of view)? Check out www.Pengon.org. You can be sure that most US news outlets never have.

ROBERT FISK: DEAD END

I HEARD the Independent’s Robert Fisk on Amy Goodman’s show on WBAI the other day adding the missing context. He is very critical of Hamas (and the Israelis) but explains:

“It’s called a road map, who invented the phrase road map? I suppose the poor old State Department and all the journalists dutifully used the word road map. They can’t use peace process because that’s associated with Oslo and that failed. You remember the cliché for the peace process, always had to be put back on track. I suppose peace process was a railway line or a railway train so it presumably always has to be put back on the main road or back on the highway that is the cliché.

He is asked “but can it work” as the Administration keeps insisting? His response: “But when you’re going to have a situation where you have an Israeli prime minister who doesn’t want to end

the settlements, who is indeed the creator of the settlements, and a Palestinian prime minister who can’t stop the intifada and a U.S. president who is so gutless he can only call a killing of a Palestinian woman and a child “troubling,” what chance is there for a road map or peace process or any other kind of agreement in the Middle East?”

WAR IS WHAT THEY WANT

WHAT is really going on is the incitement of a civil war among the Palestinians, to put the factions against one another with the promise of an eventual peace. It is not about who is right, but who will be left. Tanya Rheinhardt, who writes in depth on these issues, explains that Hamas was attacked – not because they were making war – but because they were turning towards peace, a no-no from the point of view of the hard-liners in Israel. (As usual, the reality is far from the way it is depicted.)

She writes: “From May onward we began to hear that “Hamas leaders openly declared their willingness this weekend to enter a temporary cease-fire (hudna) with Israel, for the first time since the establishment of the movement in 1987. If such a cease-fire is attained, it would mean a cessation of terror attacks against civilians in Israel. A senior Hamas spokesman in Gaza, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, who usually represents movement hardliners, said on Friday: ‘The Hamas movement is prepared to stop terror against Israeli civilians if Israel stops killing Palestinian civilians ... We have told (Palestinian Authority Prime Minister) Abu Mazen in our meetings that there is an opportunity to stop targeting Israeli civilians if the Israelis stop assassinations and raids and stop brutalizing Palestinian civilians” (Ha’aretz, Arnon Regular, May 25, 2003). What could be more suitable for a

new peace initiative than starting with a period of some calm – quiet for the Israelis without terror, quiet for the Palestinians without the constant presence of the IDF in their midst?

“Not in Sharon’s view, who repeatedly rejected this proposal. On the eve of the Aqaba summit, the headline in Ha’aretz declared: “The prime minister: A Palestinian ceasefire is not enough,” and the text continued to explain that “in his meeting with U.S. president George Bush at the Aqaba summit, prime-minister Ariel Sharon will seek the U.S. backing of his demand that the Palestinian authority will use forceful [military] means against the terror organizations and their infrastructure in the territories, as a precondition for any diplomatic advance. Sharon will tell Bush that it is not acceptable to settle just for agreements between the Palestinian organizations to a cease fire (Hudna). In return Sharon will promise Bush that Israel will evacuate illegal outposts in the West bank” (Ha’aretz Hebrew edition, Aluf Ben, June 2, 2003). In other words, until the Palestinian organizations willingly begin to kill one another, the IDF will continue to do this job for them.”

MORE THAN TWO SIDES

ISRAELI politics is just as complicated as the mosaic in Palestine. We are NOT talking about “two sides” here but many sides. The old Jewish joke: ‘three Jews, ten opinions’ still applies. Uri Avnery, an Israeli writer I admire, explains that the attempted killing of the Hamas leader, which brought us into the current “total war” situation in which Hamas and Israel vow to fight to the finish, was triggered by a small group of Generals:

“Five generals took the decision to assassinate Hamas leader Abd-al-Aziz al-Rantissi: the Prime

Minister, the Minister of Defense, the Chief-of-Staff and the chiefs of the Mossad and the Security Service. This military Junta is running Israel in practice — instead of the bunch of dwarfs called Government and the group of clowns and delinquents who have taken over the Knesset.

“The aim was to bury the Road Map right at the beginning, destroy Abu Mazen (Mahmud Abbas) and prevent the planned Hudna (truce), in order to save the settlements, continue the occupation and prevent the establishment of the State of Palestine. Sharon & Co. invited violence – and violence we got. Anyone who believes that Sharon would bring peace will believe anything.”

That is an Israeli speaking, not a Palestinian “extremist.” But it is a sentiment that is rarely reported.

BREMERVILLE

I MANAGED to catch a few seconds of testimony (by satellite) by Paul Bremer, the Wall-Street-looking “diplomat” who is trying to run Iraq. He was going on about all the Iraqis killed and captured in an operation yesterday that looked like and was a continuation of a war which the media and military has declared over. Bremer tried to project confidence about security. (See the new issue of the NATION for a long take on the privatization scheme he is implementing in that country.)

Contrast his cockiness with the views of a mother of a soldier there who has been questioning US policy. “My son’s Marine unit has been told they will remain in Iraq until at least September and that their return is not ‘date related’ but ‘situation related’. It’s important to remember - and to publicize the fact - that this war is NOT over until the last of our troops are safely home. I wonder if

the family of the soldier killed yesterday will be honored by a visit from the President, a burial at Arlington national, and a photo in the NY Times. Are those who die now not as 'heroic' as those who died before Baghdad fell? Perhaps it is not in the administration's best interest to keep the dead and wounded in the headlines at this time. We should do it for them. Thanks."

CNN: "THE PENTAGON'S BITCH"?

ANTONIA ZERIBISAS of the Toronto Star is still going after media misrepresentation of the war. She is tough, calling CNN "the Pentagon's bitch" for its role. She also notes.

"As for the Iraqis themselves, well, the media sandbagged them at the same time that they were being bombed by the invading forces. Two-thirds of them interviewed were in "streeters," (quickie soundbites recorded in the streets) with "typical comments" consisting of the insightful "God damn to bloody hell Saddam" and the equally trenchant "They can go. U.S.A. go."

So not only did the White House and the Pentagon manage to march voters unto war with their false ad campaign of how they knew "for a fact" about weapons of mass destruction, they also ensured that, with Big Media's full cooperation, the message was managed throughout the bloodletting.

Media Lens in Britain has just issued a strong report showing how British media relayed the claims of the Blair government about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq uncritically. Check them out at <http://www.MediaLens.org>

NEOCONS TARGET NGOS

ONEWORLD.NET carries a piece by Jim Lobe

reporting that conservatives are now targeting NGOs. I reported on this last week when I noted the nasty reception Fox News gave an Amnesty study on human rights abuses, even charactering their director Bill Schulza as a "spokesmouth."

Lobe writes: "While non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and Oxfam have made significant contributions to human rights, the environment, and development, they are using their growing prominence and power to pursue a "liberal" agenda at the international level that threatens U.S. sovereignty and free-market capitalism.

That was the message delivered by a series of speakers at an all-day conference, "Nongovernmental Organizations: The Growing Power of an Unelected Few [http://www.aei.org/events/eventID.329,filter.foreign/event_detail.asp]," Wednesday sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a Washington think tank that has been particularly influential with the Bush administration.

To shed more light on NGOs, AEI announced the launch of a new website (www.ngowatch.org) to provide information about their operations, funding sources, and political agendas. All very objective I am sure.

NEW MOVE TO STOP THE FCC

AS the great Yankee Yogi Berra once said on another subject: "It ain't over until it is over." And so it is for the FCC. Zwire reports: "US Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) says that he is considering employing a controversial 1996 law to fast-track legislation through Congress to counter the FCC's recent vote scaling back media ownership rules. The 1996 Congressional Review Act (CRA) has only been used once before in 2001, when Repub-

licans caught Democrats off-guard and successfully overturned ergonomics-related workplace safety regulations. “We do not use it often,” Dorган said. “That’s what it’s there for.” Even if the Democrats are able to fast-track the legislation through Congress, Bush could choose to veto it – a decision that could backfire politically. “He would have to do it under the bright glare of public scrutiny,” said a Democratic leadership aide, “and in the face of both houses of Congress saying the rule is a bad one.”

“Meanwhile, Commerce Committee chairman Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) says he is considering other legislative options proposed by fellow committee members Ted Stevens (R-AZ) and Fritz Hollings (D-SC). “I have gone from [being] a deregulator to someone who is very concerned about the level of media concentration,” McCain said.”

GREAT REPORTER.COM

YESTERDAY I chatted with Richard Powell a young journalist who is creating an impressive platform for his counterparts. It is called Great reporter.com. “The idea,” he told me, “is to help journalists get published, give them a global platform, and get visibility and recognition. He says they posted 66 stories and have 309 waiting to go up with 200,000 hits so far. A handful have been bought by other publications. This is a commercial project that seems to be filling a social need.

Anamika Wani of Online Journalism Review reported on Great Reporter this way: “It’s an online press agency with news articles from young reporters all over the world; submitted stories are checked and sold to newspapers . . . The site has been created in close collaboration with the ‘BBC News Online’ team.”

DUTCH RADIO WOES

DAVID SOLOMONOFF writes in to report that “the Dutch government has auctioned off radio frequencies to the usual suspects, forcing independent (technically illegal but previously tolerated) stations off the air. I haven’t seen any English media coverage of this yet. He relays a report that explains: “The Dutch government’s recently implemented Zerobase Radio Frequency Policy is designed to control and regulate free use of the ether by commercial radio stations. On May 23 this year most available space on the Dutch airwaves was auctioned off to the highest bidder. It should come as no surprise to anyone that as a result of this auction it has become clear that for the next eight years only the biggest, most commercially and mainstream-oriented stations will be able to exploit the remaining Dutch frequencies.”

BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT

TO preview Danny Schechter’s just published book on the media coverage of the war in Iraq visit <http://www.coldtype.net/danbook.html>. The book, “EMBEDDED: WEAPONS OF MASS DECEPTION” discusses “how the media failed to cover the war on Iraq.” Mediachannel is selling it for \$15.99.

You can pay by pay pal but must also write dissector@mediachannel.org so we can send you the PDF file. For donations of \$100, we will send you the book as well as “MEDIA WARS: News at a Time of Terror (Rowman& Littlefield) and Polarity 1’s companion CD “soundtrack. Please tell your lists and your friends. We need help in getting the word out.

