

June 18, 2003

PACIFICATION AS LIBERATION

The picture went green again, as night scope TV returned to CNN for a midnight raid on an Iraqi home covered by an often candid Ben Widman.

“Everyone is a suspect,” he intones as we watch men face down on the ground and heavily armed soldiers interrogating a woman who seemed terrified to have her home invaded. The Hollywood-named Desert Scorpion operation has “netted” (I love that word, don’t you) 400 more suspects as the night riders of the US Marines do their thing.

Former Iraqi military men were fired on with a reported two dead outside a US HQ in Baghdad. It seems as if they believed that when they laid down their arms after reading leaflets promising them safe passage and a bright future, they didn’t think they would end up this way. Another US soldier was killed yesterday. Tempers are fraying all around.

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

FOR Charles Glass, once an ABC News correspondent now writing on ZNET, it is déjà vu all over again as he compares Baghdad 2003 to Beirut in 1982. Sometimes history can be instructive:

“People cheered when the United States Marines marched into the capital. At last, someone would restore order, remove the thugs and murderers from the streets and force an end to the chaos. Then a new government arrested and tortured dissidents. The U.S. ordered the dissident’s outside backers, Syria and Iran, to stay away.

Britain joined the U.S. in policing the streets. With Washington supporting the government and training its army, the opposition strategy meant removing the Americans and the British.

“Syria and Iran helped the rebels. American soldiers shot and killed Shiite Muslims. American and British planes bombed their neighborhoods. Soon, the American embassy and the Marine headquarters were rubble. American and British civilians were taken hostage and displayed on television. Then, the American warships sailed away and took the Marines with them. The experiment in nation-building was over.”

WHAT WE COULD DO

AFTER that History Channel moment that you won’t see on the History Channel, we return to the present and some perspective from the International Crisis Group (via NYU’s Global Beat). They remind us that tempers of the conflict is mirrored by the heat of the country where the temperature can reach 140: “The International Crisis Group warns that unless the U.S. can get a handle on security and infrastructure within the next few weeks, it is likely to face not only increasingly violent resistance in Iraq, but also a general loss of credibility across the Middle East. One thing that the Americans need to do is to go outside their heavily armed compounds and establish direct contact with the population. They also need to learn to communicate more effectively. Most U.S. edicts are now printed in Iraqi newspapers that

are too expensive for the average citizen to afford, or broadcast on televisions that don't work because of a shortage of electricity."

MEDIA WAR BUZZ

HERE on the media war front, we have the resignation of Victoria "Call Me Torrie" Clarke, the Pentagon media maven. Reports the Wash Post:

"Clarke says she's leaving her top spot as Pentagon spin doctor for personal reasons. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said in a press release that in her two years of service, Clarke has "developed countless new methods to tell the story of our fighting forces, and bring their courage, dedication, and professionalism into sharp focus for all Americans."

This same newspaper is also, we are told discretely backing off from one of the war's great dramas that all the US TV networks are hot to exploit. Know it?

Reports Sam Smith in Progressive Review: "Long after the mythical official story of Private Lynch had been challenged by media such as the BBC, the Washington Post has come up with a revised version that, in a backhanded fashion, admits that what it and other major American media reported was wrong. The admission is buried in a 6,000 word account that amounts to death by detail, sure to turn off many readers. In the end, the facts of the Lynch case aren't really that interesting anyway, especially in contrast with the Bush regime's mythical version. What would be more interesting is finding out who lied to the Post and other media, and how they got away with it so easily."

NBC IS SAVING JESSICA AGAIN

BUT this bit of "revisionist" retrospection is apparently not stopping NBC, the #1 war network, from its recycling operation. Tim Goodman reports in the San Francisco Chronicle: "The network issued a weak statement Monday saying it was staying the course on its original story despite the whiff of the fish now surrounding Lynch's ordeal."

"Saving Jessica Lynch" is set to air in the fall.

"New reports, including a damning one from the BBC, suggest that the made-for-TV facts surrounding the heroic rescue may have been manipulated or are, at the very least, in high dispute. You would think that might give NBC some pause, since the story it seems intent on telling may not be what actually happened in the Iraqi desert."

"... Even if the network has no idea what to make of this movie it wanted so badly, as it appears behind the scenes, it's hard to fault NBC for elbowing aside competitors in an effort to bring the "Saving Jessica Lynch" can't-miss feel-gooder to TV. After all, her tale was a hard one to resist. That Ivory Snow face. That wrong-place-wrong-time horror. A rescue of overwhelming force seen through night-vision goggles. What didn't this story have? There was massive television coverage, newspaper ink, magazine covers, high-level military praise for Lynch's bravery – even immediate asylum for Al-Rahaief and his family. All ready-made, wrapped-in-the-flag movie-of-the-week stuff."

PHONY FEARS OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

ANOTHER war story that is biting the big one is the often repeated fears that the Iraqis were about

to shower US troops with chemical weapons.

How many times did we see soldiers and embedded journalists “suited up” to guard against this contingency? Today’s New York Times puts the lie to those fears:

“Word That U.S. Doubted Iraq Would Use Gas
By JAMES RISEN

“U.S. intelligence analysts reported last year that Iraq would almost certainly not use chemical weapons unless the government’s survival was at stake”

WHY ARE AMERICANS UNCONCERNED?

WHY is it that folks in Britain seem so much more exercised by all the lying that seems to have gone on. Eric Margolis, a conservative columnist for the Toronto Star, raises this very question:

“Why, readers in the U.S. keep asking me, are so many Americans unconcerned their government appears to have misled them and Congress over Iraq, and then waged a war with no basis in law or fact? Why is there growing outrage in Britain over Tony Blair’s equally exaggerated or patently false warnings over Iraq, while middle America couldn’t seem to care less about George Bush’s “Weaponsgate.”

“One answer is found in an old joke.

“Greenberg is sitting in a bar. He goes up to Woo, a Chinese gentleman, and punches him.

“Why’d you do that?” cries Woo.

“Because of Pearl Harbor,” snarls Greenberg.

“But I had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor, I’m Chinese!” says Woo.

“Chinese, Japanese, it’s all the same to me,” answers Greenberg.

“A month later, Greenberg sees Woo in the bar and apologizes to him.

The Chinese gentleman smiles, then punches Greenberg.

“Why did you do that?” cries Greenberg?

“Because of the Titanic.”

“What do I have to do with the Titanic?” asks Greenberg.

“Greenberg, iceberg, it’s all the same to me.”

“Iraqis, Iranians, Pakistanis, Saudis, Taliban, al-Qaeda ... it’s all too much for many geographically challenged Americans. Don’t bother us with the details and strange names, they say, kill ‘em all, God will sort ‘em out. The Muslim ‘A-rabs’ did 9/11 and we got revenge. Whacking those I-raqis made us feel a whole lot better. So what if Saddam didn’t really have the weapons of mass destruction good ole’ George W. Bush said endangered the entire world? All politicians lie. So what?”

NOT JUST A JOKE

BUT his argument doesn’t stop there. It quickly gets around to the centrality of the media: “The British and Canadian media carried both pro- and anti-war views; as a result, there was far more healthy skepticism in both nations about the war than in America.

“By contrast, much of the U.S. mainstream media muffled criticism, became part of the war effort and devoted itself to patriotic flag-waving. Most so-called Iraqi “experts” on TV, including some colleagues of mine, merely regurgitated what they had read in the morning’s Times. The Times and much of the major media were duped, to put it politely, abandoning their vital role in our democratic system as tribune and questioner of the politicians.”

WHAT DID THE WHITE HOUSE KNOW?

CYNTHIA COTTS makes some similar points in the Village Voice this week, asking “What did the president know, and when did he know it?” The refrain dates back to Watergate days, when Richard Nixon had to resign because of his lies. Just think, with gavel-to-gavel coverage, WMD hearings could be an enlightening spectacle, filling the cable channels with Watergate nostalgia while reminding the world that in America, political leaders have an obligation to tell the truth. Even lying about sex, as conservatives liked to remind us during the Clinton era, is an impeachable offense.

“Now that a Republican is accused of lying to launch an endless military occupation, hawks are rushing to reassert the legitimacy of U.S. aggression. But the “bouquet of new justifications,” as Maureen Dowd calls their arguments, have wilted quickly. What’s the rush to find WMDs? asks the Bush camp. We found other neat stuff, like torture chambers. Saddam Hussein had these weapons before, but he hid them really well-or maybe sent them to Syria. Dr. Germ and Mrs. Anthrax aren’t talking, ‘cause they don’t want to be tried as war criminals. And besides, would Dubya lie to you?”

If you want more on the pro-war side from an unlikely place read a paper “of the radical imagination” called 1st of the Month which features a rant against the anti-war movement by Charles O’Brian and some reflections by editor Benjamin Demott who describes his views as reflecting “those of us who wanted Saddam to fall more than we wanted Bush to fail.”) See their new firstofthemonth.org web site.

RIDDLED ROAD MAP

THERE was another killing of an Israeli child on the West Bank yesterday with new talks under-way between Hamas and the Palestinian authority. The Egyptians are trying to negotiate a new cease-fire first. Writing in Al-Ahram Weekly, Jonathan Cook points out that unrealistic demands for security are a major part of the peace roadmap’s weakness. Unless the Israelis offer a carrot along with their reprisals, the chance of success is minimal. Says Cook: “The fallacy from Oslo is being repeated: that a solution to the conflict can be found in the Palestinians realizing Israel’s national ambitions rather than their own, far more limited, ones. Palestinians must once again be made to enforce the occupation on Israel’s behalf. <http://www.nyu.edu/globalbeat/index.html#deception>

The new killing took place right next to a new 30-foot-high concrete barrier intended to run 625 miles and lead to the annexation of 10% of the occupied territories. The wall will, in the eyes of some of its critics, create a tiny de facto Palestinian state before the roadmap has a chance to create a larger one. OR so says Edward Sheehan in the current New York Review of Books.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

THANKS to the good work of Doug George and Anna Pizarro, we are trying to get the word out about our new book (which is also a way for Mediachannel to raise some needed moolah.) The initial response is very encouraging.

Anup Shah writes from England: “I received your media channel partner update which pointed me to coldtype.net and the 22-page excerpt of your new book. Good job. That page

also told me to email you about purchasing a copy, so here is that email! Please let me know how to get hold of a copy, and if there is an outlet in the UK that I can get it from (I had a look on amazon.co.uk for example, and didn't see it there). Also, I was wondering on the possibilities of reproducing large parts of those 22 pages on my site? I have two very long pages to do with Iraq and propaganda at <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/MiddleEast/Iraq/>

Jackie Newberry from the Great State of Texas who has been following all of the news in detail writes: "Danny, your book is so gripping and exciting. You have put it all together...lots of Wows! and Uh-huhs! for me as I read and take notes ... you make things so clear."

Some generous blurbs are coming in. Noam Chomsky was very kind yesterday and, now, the investigative reporter and best-selling muckraker Greg Palast has written a blurb: "Once again Danny Schechter has the goods on the Powers That Be. This time he's caught America's press puppies in delecto, "embed" with the Pentagon. Schechter tells the tawdry tale of the affair between officialdom and the news boys – who, instead of covering the war, covered it up. How was it that in the reporting on the 'liberation' of the people of Iraq, we saw the "liberatees" only through the gun hole of a moving Abrams tank? Schechter explains this later, lubricious twist, in the creation of the frightening new Military-Entertainment Complex."

Greg Palast, author of *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy: An Investigative Reporter Tells the Truth about Globalization, Corporate Cons and High-Finance Fraudsters*.

ENGAGING THE CYNICS

THAT is not to say that everyone was ecstatic, I heard from one reporter on the Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) who could not have shown less Southern hospitality. Military correspondent Ron Martz was outright hostile, writing: "Sure. I'd love to read about how biased I was from someone who wasn't there."

He didn't respond to my attempt to engage him, so I asked John Sugg of Atlanta's other paper, the weekly *Creative Loafing* about him. His response: "Yeah, I know Martz. His standard story was "noble, dedicated GIs prepare for war" followed by "noble, dedicated GIs off to fight war" followed by the classic "noble, dedicated GIs do battle."

"He actually had some good field reports, but combined with the AJC's truly awful gung-ho war slant (hey, remember that FCC decision?), his was just one echo about how wonderful war is. I've got a database of about 70 war-related stories, well reported by the foreign press or some US media, that were never covered by the AJC, or whose mention came long after the event. (The Iraq-Niger nuke fraud, e.g.) Rather than invest in some real reporting, the AJC tried to outdo TV in surface, facile coverage.

"BTW, Martz's high point was a story about how two GIs riding with him got hit by gunfire. Martz wrote – and I'm serious – that God had placed the soldiers between him and the bullets. I had a lot of fun with that one – somehow the sorry ass of this 50-something suck-up reporter was more important to The Lord than two kids.

"In person, Martz is one of the nicest guys in the world."

