

September 2, 2003

SEASON CHANGE: TURN, TURN, TURN

It was as if someone threw a switch. Summer exited stage right and a rainy fall followed within minutes as temperatures dropped. My sinuses alerted me to the change before I could even look out of the window. At least I had one comforting thought to keep me warm this morning. It is the New York Times quote of the day. Clip it and slap it up on your refrigerator:

"THINGS ARE GETTING BETTER" – PRESIDENT BUSH

NOW that I feel better, we can go on one of those global excursions to see just how better they are. In Iraq, we have tens of thousands of Shia on the march, mourning the assassination of their Ayatollah Hakim. If you saw 60 Minutes reprise of Bob Simon's interview with the late cleric whose body was so damaged in that bomb attack that only his black cap survived, you would have heard him recommend the same remedy that his followers are demanding today – namely that Iraqis be given authority to police themselves since the American military is really not up to the task. There was another American killed in an accident there, another bombing, and that beat goes on. But Iraqis, heed the leader of your occupation: "Things are getting better."

TEARS AND ANGER

BBC went live this morning to the outpouring of anger. Saddam Hussein issued a statement saying

his followers didn't do it, but it is not clear if it was believed. If you have missed the dramatic images, here's a snatch of an AP report from Sunday: The faithful followed a flatbed truck carrying a symbolic coffin for Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, a moderate cleric and Saddam Hussein opponent. Authorities said they could only find al-Hakim's hand, watch, wedding band and pen in the wreckage. "Our revenge will be severe on the killers," read one of the many banners carried by mourners. Red and white roses were laid on the coffin and a large portrait of al-Hakim was placed in front of it."

There were also emotional services in Brazil for Sergio Vieira de Mello, the assassinated UN chief. According to the Independent, "Brazil's media republished lengthy interviews in which Vieira de Mello evocatively described the resentment welling up in the Iraqi population. He openly pushed for full Iraqi control of the country by 2004, a quicker training of an all-Iraqi police force, and referred to the occupation as "humiliating" for Iraqis.

He also was frank in describing his fear of being a target. Mentioning the tongue-in-cheek Brazilian saying that claims "God is Brazilian," Vieira de Mello told the Jornal do Brasil that he hoped the saying meant God would offer him special protection.

The conservative Estado newspaper noted that the U.S. military was responsible for providing security at the U.N. headquarters. Only days

before the attack, the paper noted, Vieira de Mello personally complained to United Nations authorities that the security at the building seemed inadequate.”

PROPAGANDA ALERT

AND what is the full body count anyway? UK-based propaganda expert Paul Du Rooj has been reporting on this. His latest shows how combat deaths are being converted into accidents:

“A good barometer of the propaganda in action is the way US military deaths are reported. Here is a curious example where a fatality has been reclassified. On August 20th CentCom issued the following communiqué (abridged, emphasis added):

August 20, 2003 Release Number: 03-08-40”
ONE KILLED, ONE INJURED AFTER CONVOY FIRED UPON

BAGHDAD, Iraq - One 3rd Corps Support Command soldier was killed and another injured in a two-vehicle accident while driving south on the main supply route southeast of the town of Ad Diwaniyah.

“The soldiers were driving in a supply convoy of Palletized Loading System vehicles when they received small arms fire and struck another vehicle.

“Security, medical and recovery assets were dispatched to the scene. One soldier died as a result of the accident.

A day later DefenseLink issued the following confirmation notification (abridged, emphasis added).

Aug 21, 2003 DefenseLink No. 613-03 DoD Identifies Army Casualty. The Department of Defense announced today that Spc. Kenneth W. Harris, Jr., 23, was killed on Aug. 20 in Scania, Iraq. Harris

was fatally injured in a two-vehicle accident while driving south on the main supply route. Another soldier was also injured in the incident.

Presto! A combat death magically becomes an accidental death so the American and British media will not need to include this victim in their body count tallies. One only wonders what the family of the victim will think of this reclassification.”

CIVILIAN DEATH COUNT ALSO GROWS

MEANWHILE, the Village Voice’s Jim Ridgeway writes: “Amid increasing suspicions that the U.S. media have been underestimating Iraqi casualties, here are the latest more or less reliable figures culled from several sources, including the government:

“Iraq Body Count (iraqbodycount.net) reported that the number of civilian deaths in Iraq ranges from 6,113 to 7,830. Military.com reports that as of August 28 a total of 281 U.S. soldiers have been killed since the start of the invasion—that includes 143 since major fighting was declared “over” on May 1. The Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (lunaville.org/warcasualties/summary.aspx), based on tallies from Centcom, the Defense Department, and the British Ministry of Defence, shows that, as of August 27, 281 U.S. soldiers, 50 British soldiers, and two “other” coalition soldiers have been reported killed. The estimated wounded? 1,212.

“But by far the most interesting and quite possibly most realistic report comes by way of Jude Wanniski, the supply-side economist and ex-Wall Street Journal reporter who has struck up a correspondence with Mohammad al-Obaidi, an Iraqi doctor living in Britain. Al-Obaidi told Wanniski that “hundreds of our party’s cadre” spent five

weeks interviewing undertakers, hospital officials, and ordinary citizens in all of Iraq (except for what's controlled by the Kurds) and came up with a total figure of 37,137 civilians killed since the beginning of the invasion, 6,103 of them in Baghdad.

Those figures, according to al-Obaidi, do not include members of unofficial militias, paramilitary groups, or Saddam's Fedayeen units." And so as we see the actual death toll is likely much higher than the reported one. For its part the US military says "We don't do death counts."

FIRST DRAFT

AS for the military in Iraq, Tom Friedman of the NY Times is warning that draft age Americans have something to worry about. He wrote on Labor Day: "If you think we don't have enough troops in Iraq now - which we don't - wait and see if the factions there start going at each other. America would have to bring back the draft to deploy enough troops to separate the parties. In short, we are at a dangerous moment in Iraq. We cannot let sectarian violence explode. We cannot go on trying to do this on the cheap. "Hey Tom, Things are getting better. Don't you read your own newspaper.

Moving on to Indonesia, and in a setback to the war on terror the notorious Ba'ashir has been **AQUITTED** of treason this morning by a court in Indonesia He was pictured as an Al Qaeda mastermind for the region. Several judges rejected the government case.

QUESTIONS ABOUT DR. KELLY

IN England the family of Dr. David Kelly, the UK weapons expert who died of a suicide, testified to the Hutton Inquiry into his death. They said he

was very distressed by the treatment he was receiving at the hands of the government. According to the Guardian, his widow told the Hutton inquiry her husband was betrayed. "They broke his heart. They put him in a nightmare." Family members also said he showed no signs of wanting to end his own life. Today the BBC is reporting that "The last person known to have seen Dr David Kelly alive has told the Hutton inquiry that the government scientist seemed his normal self on his way to his apparent suicide.

Neighbor Ruth Absalom met and briefly chatted to Dr Kelly at the top of Harris' Lane in Longworth, about a mile from her home, as she walked her dog at about 1500 BST on 17 July." Reports like these are raising suspicions that may still be more to this story than we know.

BBC reminds us: "Dr. Kelly of course was found dead just over a week after being named as the suspected source for the BBC report suggesting the government exaggerated the intelligence case against Iraq in last September's dossier."

KRUGMAN: NEWS IS IGNORED

ON the media front, you now have to read Paul Krugman in the New York Times to tell us what his newspaper and others do not. He writes today about an electricity issue that is also a media problem: "When the E.P.A. makes our air dirtier, or the Interior Department opens a wilderness to mining companies, or the Labor Department strips workers of some more rights, the announcement always comes late on Friday - when the news is most likely to be ignored on TV and nearly ignored by major newspapers.

"Last Friday the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, known as FERC, announced settle-

ments with energy companies accused of manipulating markets during the California energy crisis. Why on Friday? Because the settlements were a joke: the companies got away with only token payments. It was yet another demonstration of how electricity deregulation has gone wrong.” It was also another demonstration of how our media system goes wrong, again and again.

RESOURCES FOR READERS

SOME online resources for you. Al Jazeera writes to say that they now have an English language site that is up and running:
<http://english.aljazeera.net/HomePage>

Greg Thornwall writes to tell us about a new blog published by a young Iraqi woman in Baghdad. It is brilliantly written and very insightful about the differences in the way Americans and Iraqis perceive the country’s problems. Book mark this: <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/>

Tony Sutton of Coldtype.net is back from South Africa and has lots of new postings on his beautifully designed site: They include postings from George Monbiot (three new columns), John Pilger (three new columns), Norman Solomon (two new columns), Antonia Zerbisias (two new columns), and Michael I. Niman (two new columns).

Check them out at <http://www.coldtype.net>

