

September 9, 2003

THE COCOON IN CANCUN

All eyes on Cancun. That's where the WTO meeting gets underway tomorrow. And that's where some deals can go down that will effect countries with the most needs and the least resources. Watch how these meetings are reported, if they are reported at all. George Monbiot writes in the Guardian: "Outside the world trade talks beginning in Cancun in Mexico tomorrow, two battles will be fought. The first will be the battle between the campaigners demanding fair trade and the rich-nation delegates demanding unfair trade. The second will be the dispute now brewing within the ranks of those who claim to be helping the poor.

"The problem all those who want a fairer deal face is that there has seldom, if ever, been a trade treaty struck between rich and poor which does not amount to legalized theft. The draft agreement the members of the World Trade Organization will discuss this week is no exception. While it permits the rich nations to continue protecting their markets, it seeks to force the poor nations to open their economies to several novel forms of institutional piracy."

"A BAR SCENE FROM STAR WARS"

TOM HAYDEN is covering the WTO meet for Alternet. His preview: "The 1999 Seattle anti-WTO protests "looked like the bar scene from Star Wars" to the paranoid eyes of the WTO's director,

Mike Moore (not to be confused with Michael Moore). As evidence of the impact of those protests, Moore's newly-published memoir features a cover photo of a puppet resembling himself with the placard, "Michael Moore Starves the Poor". Yet Moore, like the passive-aggressive WTO itself, stumbles on. The benefits of globalization, he insists, demand it... Will these people never learn? We'll see. The next stop for the WTO, and for the global justice movement: Cancun, Mexico, Sept. 8-15. Thousands of protestors will be howling at the moon. Will the result be new momentum for the WTO, or a dramatic expansion of the global challenge to American corporate power?"

DOES CRITICISM PROMOTE TERRORISM?

I AM in a quandary this morning, as are at least some of my media colleagues. What to do? Secretary 4 more war Rumsfeld believes that critics may be playing into the hands of the evil doers. Reported the Wash Post: "On the plane back to the U.S., Rumsfeld accused his critics of aiding terrorists and slowing the pacification of Iraq." He also said no one could have foreseen the tactics of the enemy who clearly were not playing fair. He is increasingly sounding like one of the British commanders in New England in 1775 who condemned the colonial farmer-soldiers for hiding behind trees instead of going mano a mano with the Red-coats and shooting it out on the common. It was

the British who were talking about pacification then. Now US. terms like “pacification” conjure up Vietnam and make clear – and I am just going to have to come out and say it folks – this is another war “we” are losing.

THE VIETNAM PARALLEL

PEPE ESCOBAR who writes for Asia Times online sees the Vietnam parallel LITERALLY, not just metaphorically. He believes that it is the strategic doctrine of Hanoi’s masterful General Giap – which, for all extents and purposes, defeated the US is influencing the Iraqis. He writes from Hanoi:

“Just as it took a few years for the Americans to lose the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese, it took them only a few weeks to lose the hearts and minds of the majority of Iraqis – which ultimately means losing the war, whatever the strategic final result. Topographic denials – this is the Mesopotamian desert, not the Indochinese jungle – don’t work, nor do denials saying that the Iraqis are not as politicized as the Vietnamese were by communism. These totally miss the point: as happened in Vietnam, what is happening now in Iraq has everything to do with patriotism and nationalism.

“Former Iraqi vice premier Tariq Aziz used to say, before the US invasion, “Let our cities be our swamps and our buildings our jungles.” Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, aka “Comical Ali”, the unforgettable former minister of information, used to say Iraq would be “another Indochina”. The guerrilla war strategy against what was considered an inevitable US invasion has been perfected in Iraq for years. And the master strategist was neither an Assyrian nor a Mesopotamian general, but the legendary Vo Nguyen Giap, the

Vietnamese general who coordinated the victories against French colonialism and US meddling.

“Iraqi strategists – from army officials to Ba’ath Party officials – have always been thorough students of the Vietnam War, or American War, as it is referred to in Vietnam. In addition, the Iraqi urban population is very well educated and analyzes events with a deep historical sense – as well as the Vietnamese....”

THE ROCK. THE HARD PLACE

“We” long ago lost the moral edge. But the military conflict is far from over. At issue: what do we mean by “winning”. The US-appointed governing council in Iraq is going to be asking the US about its exit strategy. Hint. Hint. Nudge. Nudge. They clearly want the US to beat a retreat. So what we are stuck between is the proverbial rock and a hard place. No wonder that we now hear growing demands for the US to leave Iraq. While so-called pragmatists in the media like TIME’s Joe Klein echo the Administration view that “retreat is not an option,” others are imagining what they see as the inevitable, the Nation’s Jonathan Schell among them:

“The cost of leaving will certainly be high, but not anywhere near as high as trying to “stay the course,” which can only magnify and postpone the disaster. And yet – regrettable to say – even if this difficult step is taken, no one should imagine that democracy will be achieved by this means. The great likelihood is something else – something worse: perhaps a recrudescence of dictatorship or civil war, or both. An interim period – probably very brief – of international trusteeship is the best solution, yet it is unlikely to be a good solution. It is merely better than any other recourse.

“The good options have probably passed us by. They may never have existed. If the people of Iraq are given back their country, there isn’t the slightest guarantee that they will use the privilege to create a liberal democracy. The creation of democracy is an organic process that must proceed from the will of the local people. Sometimes that will is present, more often it is not. Vietnam provides an example. Vietnam today enjoys the self-determination it battled to achieve for so long; but it has not become a democracy...”

DEVELOPING “CONCEPTS”

HOW is it that that the resistance by Iraqis could not be foreseen. Have we not been watching the response to occupation by Palestinians for twenty years? Listen to this from The Independent’s Robert Fisk, reporting on Senate hearings: “Assistant Under Secretary Douglas Feith, one of Rumsfeld’s “neo-cons”, revealed that an office for “post-war planning” had only been opened three weeks earlier. He and Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman conceded that the Pentagon had been “thinking” about post-war Iraq for 10 months. “There are enormous uncertainties,” Feith said. “The most you can do in planning is develop concepts.”

Concepts? Concepts? What planet do these people live on? And yet despite all the questions and hand wringing, the lead headline in the New York Times this morning is this: “BUSH LIKELY TO GET MONEY HE SOUGHT, LAWMAKERS AGREE.” There will be questions, the newspaper of record advises, but HE WILL GET THE MONEY!

THE HUMAN COSTS

OUTSIDE America, journalist ask deeper ques-

tion about the issue of “costs” as Fisk does pointing to how costs are calculated: “But notice, too, how everything is predicated to America’s costs, to American blood. An American commentator, Rosie DiManno, wrote this week that in Iraq “There’s also the other cost, the one measured in human lives... one American a day slain since Bush declared the major fighting over.” Note here how the blood of Iraqis – whom we were so desperate to liberate six months ago – has disappeared from the narrative. Up to 20 innocent Iraqi civilians a day are now believed to be dying – in murders, revenge killings, at US checkpoints – and yet they no longer count. No wonder journalists now have to seek permission from the occupation authorities to visit Baghdad hospitals. Who knows how many corpses they would find in the morgue?:

PEACEFUL TOMORROWS? IT IS UP TO US

LAST night I went into an event marking the publication of a new book by Akashic Press by a group of 9/11 families – people who lost love ones – who are campaigning for peace, for “peaceful tomorrows” as they put it. It was an emotional event and yet one characterized by questions, questions about US foreign policy choices and the still-not-fully-explained background to the events of 9/11 whose second anniversary we mark. I came home to catch the end of Ric Burns’s richly photographed poetic tribute to the people of New York City, especially those who cleaned up the massive mess created when the towers fell. It was long on back patting and short on the kinds of questions that PBS and most media outlets here still ignore. A Brazilian correspondent for GLOBO was at the event last night as was a German TV

crew. No one from the US media turned up, save Globalvision and a film maker profiling Amy Goodman of Democracy Now who sensitively moderated a panel of people who went from grieving victims to peace activists.

Where is the questioning to be found. Try Canada. The Toronto Star invited Noam Chomsky to have a say. He writes: "For the second 9/11 anniversary and beyond, we basically have two choices. We can march forward with confidence that the global enforcer will drive evil from the world, much as the president's speechwriters declare, plagiarizing ancient epics and children's tales.

"Or we can subject the doctrines of the proclaimed grand new era to scrutiny, drawing rational conclusions, perhaps gaining some sense of the emerging reality.

"We also should be able to appreciate recent comments on the matter by Ami Ayalon, the 1996-2000 head of Shabak, Israel's General Security Service, who observed that "those who want victory" against terror without addressing underlying grievances "want an unending war."

MARGOLIS: "FAUNING U.S. MEDIA"

ALSO from Canada, we have the voice of Eric Margolis who questions the war on terror as well: 'President George Bush was widely regarded pre-9/11 as a hapless, rather comical figure enmeshed in the Enron scandal. The savage assaults transformed him into a savior on a white horse, bathed in praise by the fawning U.S. media.

"The Bush administration created a firestorm of jingoism, war fever, and national hysteria that quickly obscured its failure to protect the nation from an attack that Mideast observers, including

this column, had predicted was coming.

"Bush declared a war on terrorism and dispatched U.S. armed forces to attack Muslim mischief-makers around the globe. This, however, was not a real war, but rather a police action against disparate bands of violent anti-American extremists determined to drive U.S. political and economic influence from their lands, and aid the struggle in Palestine.

"Declaring 'war on terrorism' made no more sense than declaring war on evil."

REVIEWS OF THE SPEECH ARE STILL COMING IN

HERE'S The Nation's David Corn: "Television viewers on Sunday night had a choice of two George W. Bushes. They could see him standing tall on a Showtime docudrama on 9/11 (produced by a prominent Hollywood conservative), in which a heroic Bush all but exclaims "damn the torpedoes" before all but parachuting Rambo-like into Afghanistan to capture Osama bin Laden single-handedly. (Remember bin Laden?) Or they could watch the real thing stiffly read a speech in which he did little than to urge Americans and allies to buck up and stay his course.

"There's nothing like dropping to a 52-percent approval rating to send a president – especially a wartime president – rushing to the Cabinet room (sans table) to deliver a primetime speech declaring "great progress..."

SHARION'S TRAVELS

ISRAEL'S Ariel Sharon is on a business trip to India. It seems that Israel has one of the few arms industries that can fix and update all of their Soviet made military equipment. The Mail and Guardian reports: "Israeli Prime Minister Ariel

Sharon has hailed India as “one of the most important countries in the world” before going into talks with his hosts aimed at expanding military and political cooperation. His visit to India has been denounced by India’s Muslim and left-wing groups.” <http://www.mg.co.za/Content>

MEDIA NEWS: AL JAZEERA DENOUNCES ARREST

IN the media news, the Spanish judge who had Al Jazeera’s correspondent arrested there has three days to charge him or free him.

“Prosecutors said Alouni told Garzon he paid \$3,000 to \$4,000 to members of al Qaeda on five or six occasions dating to 1995 when he traveled to Afghanistan and Turkey, but said he did so out of solidarity with Syrian exiles in those countries

“Alouni’s arrest drew criticism from Arab human rights groups as well as his colleagues at Qatar-based Al Jazeera, who called on Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar to release him.

Al Jazeera Chairman Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani slammed Alouni’s detention as a “grave injustice” and urged Aznar to intercede on his behalf. That a journalist has sources inside an underground organization is a cause for pride, not infamy and persecution,” Thani said in a statement, adding that Alouni’s “exemplary” work in Afghanistan and Iraq was a major factor in the channel’s success”

Now the International Federation of Journalists is supporting Al Jazeera: “Over the past year there have been an expression of irritation by western, particularly American, officials over the work of some Arab media and Al-Jazeera in particular,” said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. “Its offices have been attacked by the military in Afghanistan and twice in Iraq. With this latest

arrest it all begins to look like developing into an international witch-hunt.”

TV ANCHOR REFUSED TO REPORT BOGUS NEWS

IN England, the BBC Board of Governors is calling for full probe of investigative reporting techniques and procedures. The Media Guardian reports: “The BBC chairman, Gavyn Davies, wrote of the planned examination of the comments on the dossier in an email to the corporation’s governors. The email was written three days after Dr Kelly’s body was found and was submitted by the BBC to the Hutton inquiry and made public yesterday.”

The Guardian also reports that one of the country’s top news anchors Sir Trevor McDonald of ITV’s News of Ten refused to report the Blair government’s claim that the Iraqis could launch WMD’s in 45 minutes “ But Sir Trevor insisted he would prefer to be sacked rather than sacrifice his principles of fair and honest coverage.” He says, in contrast certainly with most US anchors,

“I refused to do a piece while in Baghdad about weapons of mass destruction.... strangely enough it was about this 45-minute claim,” Sir Trevor said.

“I said that I could find nothing in what I had read or [in] any evidence from anyone I had talked to that this was possible – that London could be hit,” he said at a student editors’ function organized by the Daily Telegraph.”

The Committee to Protect Journalists is investigating the third murder of journalist in three weeks. It condemns the recent spate of attacks on journalists in the Philippines. CPJ is currently investigating the murders of three reporters killed during the last three weeks. In the most recent incident, journalist Juan “Jun” Pala was killed in

the southern city of Davao on Saturday, September 6. Pala, a commentator on DXGO radio, was also known as an anti-communist activist. The motive for his murder is unclear.

RECORDING INDUSTRY ANNOUNCES LAWSUITS AGAINST MUSIC SHARERS

THE Electronic Frontier Foundation reports that the “Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) today filed 261 lawsuits against people who allegedly shared copyrighted music online. The RIAA announced plans to sue more file-sharers and introduced an “amnesty” program available only to file-sharers who the RIAA has not yet identified or sued.

“More lawsuits is not the answer. Does anyone think that suing 60 million American file-sharers is going to motivate them to buy more CDs?” said EFF Staff Attorney Wendy Setzler. “File sharing networks represent the greatest library of music in history, and music fans would be happy to pay for access to it, if only the recording industry would let them.”

STIFF AND LISTLESS

FINALLY, just passing on Tom Shale’s review, not of the content of President Bush’s speech but its delivery: “Consistently throughout the speech, Bush’s eyes were glued to the prompting device attached to the camera – though he still kept turning the typed pages of text in front of him –

and at first he seemed to be reciting rather than talking. He was stiff and listless, as he sometimes is without an audience present. The expression on his face suggested anxiety as much as it did resolve. But as he continued, Bush relaxed a little in his delivery and seemed less frozen before the camera....”

THE ISRAEL TERROR TOUR

FINALLY, Finally from our terrorism tourist bureau, an ad from Ha’aretz as relayed by TomDispatch.com: “The Ultimate Mission to Israel: While most people might prefer a vacation away from the war on terrorism, Shurat HaDin, the Israel Law Center, is offering a luxury package this November for ‘English-speaking professionals’ who want to get closer to the action. Participants will not only be able to enjoy ‘small air-planes flight over the Galilee, moonlight cruise on the Kinneret Lake, a cook-out barbecue and a traditional Shabbat enjoying the rich religious and historic wonders of Jerusalem’s Old City,’ but also see an ‘exhibition by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) undercover soldiers who carry out targeted assassinations of Palestinian terrorists and deep penetration raids in Arab territory.’ On day three of this seven-day package, participants will be able to witness the ‘security trial of Hamas terrorists’ in an Israeli military court. The complete package (excluding airfares) is \$1,480 with an additional \$500 to \$5,000 donation to the Center to ‘aid in the fight’ against Arab terror.”

