

Powell, plagiarism, taxes and war

THE MEDIA SPIN after Colin Powell's UN speech was about as dynamic as a Fox News debate. Cheerleading talking heads immediately took to the airwaves to discern whether or not Powell succeeded in building a consensus for war. Did he pull it off? Will those arrogant pompous self-righteous French – up to their asses in their own war TO secure the world's chocolate supply in the Ivory Coast – support the pillage in Iraq? What about the Germans? What do they have against launching a Blitzkrieg or a Dresden-style firestorm against Baghdad? What about the Turks? Their empire once stretched to Europe. So why are they raining on our parade? What about the Angolans? Are they for real? Don't they realize they could be next if they don't get with the program?

One pundit asked if Powell presented enough evidence to sentence Saddam to death. Well, it's not that simple. The question is, did he make a convincing argument to sentence Saddam, and the judge, and the jury, and the bailiff - how about the whole damn courtroom - to death? Because that's what war is. The French remember it. The Germans remember it. Its horror is embedded in their cultures. But most Americans, with the notable exception of combat veterans, don't have a clue as to what this word means.

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Missing from the whole "was Powell convincing?" choir, was any question regarding, "was Powell telling the truth?" Yes, I thought Powell was convincing. But then historian Howard Zinn's voice suddenly popped into my head, arguing that a key rule for journalists is to "Never trust government officials - from any government." History has shown that as a rule, with few exceptions, they habitually lie. They lie to get into office. And they lie once they're in office. The current regime in Washington has elevated the art of lying to official policy, with the Department of Defense attempting to set up an Office of Strategic Influence (based upon an earlier Reagan/Bush era Office of Strategic Information) for the stated purpose of planting misinformation in the world's media. The idea died because people believed Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was telling the truth about lying, just as they believe him when he's lying about telling the truth. Nonetheless, he promised to keep dispelling misinformation, Office of Strategic Influence or not.

This is simple stuff. An organization that has a history of lying, that set up special bureaucracies to create and dispense lies, that has a stated policy to lie, might in fact be lying.

This doesn't necessarily mean that Colin Powell is lying. It could just as easily mean that he has been lied to. Either way, journalists need to dig deeper. This is, after all, an important story.

Cut, Paste and Pontificate

One embarrassing revelation about Powell's speech was that a key part of his evidence against Iraq was cut and pasted from a California graduate student's outdated academic paper, ripped directly from the internet. In academia, we call this plagiarism. Stealing something straight off of a website, an act easily detected by feeding a string of words into a Google search, is plagiarism in its cheesiest form. Students who do it fail classes - this is non negotiable. In Powell's case, he's not the plagiarizer. He properly cited a British intelligence service report, four pages of which were ripped off without citation, complete with spelling and grammatical errors, from a paper that appeared five months ago in an obscure academic journal.

The Brits, for their part, changed a few words here and there, inflated numbers, and added the term "terrorist" to make the Iraqis appear more ominous than the student-author intended. He told the British newspaper, *The Mirror*, that the misuse of his doctored work represented "wholesale deception." Ominous or not, however, 97% of the citations in the student paper were three to fifteen years old, rendering the whole package useless in a speech challenging Iraq's compliance to the current inspection regimen. The American Secretary of State, with this trash in his hand, addressed the

United Nations Security Council, calling for the commencement of a war that might never end. For the American media, the only question worth asking was whether Powell's sham was convincing.

Inspectors challenge Powell

One person Powell didn't convince was UN Chief Weapons Inspector Hans Blix, who countered Powell's allegations by reporting that the UN weapons inspectors found no evidence of mobile truck based weapons labs as alleged by Powell, nor was there any evidence, provided by the US or any other nation, of Iraq trying to foil inspections by moving equipment, which was also alleged by Powell. Blix also argued that his operation on the ground in Iraq was secure, and that Iraqis did not, contrary to what Powell asserted, have advanced knowledge of inspections. Perhaps Colin Powell should have spoken to Hans Blix, and not Austin Powers, before making a fool of himself and us in front of the world. Blix's comments were front page news in Europe, while they were all but invisible in the US corporate media, a fact that helps explain the divergence in public opinion across the pond.

Former U.N. weapons inspector and U.S. Marine intelligence officer Scott Ritter also attacked Powell's report as misleading, telling Japan Today that Powell "just hits you, hits you, hits you with circumstantial evidence, and he confuses people - and he lied, he lied to people, he mislead people." Ritter took Powell to task for holding up a vial of powder, and telling the U.N. that this much anthrax shut down the U.S. Senate, killed postal workers, and so on. Ritter pointed out that Iraq produced liquid anthrax. What shut down the U.S. Senate, he argued, "was U.S. government anthrax! It had nothing to do with Iraq." Ritter also pointed out that it was his team that first came up with the theory of mobile weapons labs, but never found any evidence of the existence of any such labs.

I can concede that it's possible that Powell might be right, and Blix and Ritter may be wrong. But I'll also argue that it's insane to go to war on an unsubstantiated "might" argued without solid evidence by liars, fools and plagiarizers. What we need is more inspectors on the ground and more time for inspections. From a cold economic viewpoint, the UN could hire one inspector to follow every Iraqi citizen for a cost far lower than the \$100 billion this war will cost us.

On the subject of money, war or not, Bush's mobilization of a quarter million US troops to the Persian Gulf has proved to be quite a pricey foray. Yet, we are not moving into a wartime economy, which traditionally means raising taxes on those who can most afford to pay them, in order to pay the bills for a war that poor people (American and otherwise) will pay for with their lives. To the contrary, The Bush Administration is piloting the

economy like a rich drunk at the wheel of a speeding Hummer, careening out of control and bashing through schools, health clinics, houses and museums. "Shazzam Mr. Cheney! – Ain't this fun?"

Who'll pay? We will

I've been looking at a number of estimates regarding the upcoming Bush deficit budget. Using conservative numbers, next year's deficit will add up to a \$6,000 - \$12,000 annual debt for a family of four. "Re" elect these fools and a family of four will be looking at, according to conservative models, an accrued debt of \$30,000 upwards to \$120,000 over the life of the Bush Administration. Don't trust me - do the math yourself. The above numbers don't include the costs of the Iraqi war and indefinite occupation (we still have troops in Korea, Germany etc.), nor do they account for the fallout from a possible global boycott of American goods or divestment in US securities in the event that the Bush administration disregards international law or uses its own weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

With these figures in mind, let's take a look at Bush's proposed \$674 Billion tax cut. It's this handout to the richest Americans that is solely behind Bush's proposed \$460 Billion+ proposed deficit (\$300 billion plus the pillage of \$160 billion Social Security surplus). Hence, the debt load accrued by working families presents a direct transfer of wealth to the richest Americans. Reuters News Service (France) reports that using the last known year's tax returns (2002) for Bush and Cheney, under their proposed plan, Bush would reap a \$16,511 savings on dividend taxes alone, while Cheney's capital gains tax cut would amount to \$278,103. This, of course, is on top of the earlier Bush/Cheney tax cuts for the rich, which gave Cheney a tax cut of \$43,000 in 2001, while Bush enjoyed a cut of \$7,205. The word "pillage" seems appropriate here, especially when we juxtapose these numbers against cuts in funding for public education, health care, housing, environmental programs and the Arts.

Remember these numbers as your public college tuition goes up, as your local property and school taxes go up, as Bush's fellow Republicans try to raise your sales taxes, and as you're nickel and dimed to death with user fees. Then try to remember again how we live in the world's richest country. ●