

Fraud week

IT'S always been one of the unwritten diplomatic rules – foreign leaders shouldn't meddle in American elections. Then came Iyad Allawi, the supposed "Prime Minister" of Iraq. Allawi's recent United Nations address and public appearances in the U.S. reek of partisan Bush campaign rhetoric. Put simply, Allawi is shamelessly "on message," repeating tired old Bush team lies about a fantasy Iraq in the midst of a glorious reconstruction. Allawi's Iraq is a mirage nestled on the threshold of democracy, replete with ample drinking water, reliable electricity and a successful new entrepreneurial class. It's the embodiment of "mission accomplished" -- an Iraq that exists only in the oratory of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld.

The real story is that Iyad Allawi is hardly a "Prime Minister." He received his title from the U.S.-appointed Iraq Governing Council as part of the Bush administration's Iraqi sovereignty charade. Allawi is a former Baath official who defected to Britain in 1976, becoming an operative for MI6, the U.K.'s version of the C.I.A. More recently, he was one of the main sources for the misinformation about Saddam's supposed weapons of mass destruction during the run-up to the Iraq invasion. Patrick Cockburn of The Independent of London credits Allawi as the source for the misinformation alleging that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction which "could be operational in 45 minutes." Dupes like Senator John Kerry bought into the lies, authorizing a war that eventually installed Allawi as "Prime Minister" of a homeland he fled almost three decades earlier.

This time around Kerry called Allawi on his obvious lies. The scandal in the press,

however, wasn't about the "leader" of the Iraqi puppet regime shilling for the Bush team, or about the Bushistas shamelessly choreographing Allawi's litany of tired old lies. No. The scandal was about John Kerry, as George W. Bush put it, questioning "Prime Minister Allawi's credibility." With the neo-con echo chamber in full force at FOX "News" and on Clear Channel radio stations, Kerry was chastised for pointing out that the naked emperor was naked.

Forgery-Gate & Forgotten Truths

This is par for the course. Earlier in the week, the corporate media was abuzz with allegations that CBS News' story about Bush's National Guard service (or lack thereof) was based on forged documents. In the ensuing frenzy, the media spun the AWOL Bush as a victim of a nasty slander campaign. In reality, however, the CBS story only echoed earlier reports broken, without relying on questionable documents, by The Boston Globe and The Nation. Their stories, based on recently released government documents and interviews with people who would have been Bush's fellow guardsman, had Bush been there, detail evidence of Bush being grounded, being AWOL, and failing to complete his Guard duty.

These earlier reports, which verified years of speculation, should have been national news – but they were trumped by the scandal over CBS' faulty handling of the story. Hence, the reality that the essential facts of the CBS story were correct, despite CBS' failure to properly report the story themselves, was lost on a media-dazed public. At the end of the day the echo-chamber spin framed Bush as a victim of the "liberal media." Damage control doesn't get any better than this.

The real question is who launched those tainted documents in CBS' direction? One clue has emerged: Hours after the CBS report, a post on the ultra right wing Free Republic website meticulously detailed the flaws in the documents cited by CBS. According to an investigation by The Los Angeles Times, the poster, who used the online handle "Buckhead," was actually Republican party operative Harry MacDougald, who led the fight to disbar President Clinton during the Monica Lewinski scandal.

It gets thicker. CBS originally planned to air an investigation exposing the fabrication of evidence linking Iraq with weapons of mass destruction in the run-up to the U.S. invasion. That story, featuring correspondent Ed Bradley, was bumped so that CBS could run its tainted report on Bush's National Guard service. Had CBS not bumped this report, Bush would have been smarting from a one-two punch of reality with the W.M.D. story appearing hot on the tail of the Boston Globe and Nation reports about an AWOL Bush. CBS now refuses to air the W.M.D., lamely arguing that it's too close to election time and

the story might taint the outcome – as if truth was something the American people need to be protected against.

Don't believe the hype

Of course, if we are to believe the polls, the election is a done deal – we might as well stay home and resign ourselves to an endless Orwellian purgatory. Only the polls don't seem to make any sense. During my recent sojourns in Republican rural Central New York, I've seen nary a Bush sign among the hundreds of "Bush Must Go" placards. I've been getting similar reports lately from across the American heartland – this supposed groundswell of Bush support is all but invisible.

So how does the Gallup poll put Bush up to 13 points ahead of Kerry? To find the answer we need to look not at Bush or Kerry, but at Gallup. The family-owned company, once a stalwart of neutral polling, was bought in 1988 by Selection Research of Lincoln, Nebraska. The current C.E.O., James Clifton, is a Republican Party donor. The methodology Gallup currently uses skews results to favor Republican candidates. First, they telephone households and ask to speak initially with the youngest male. Men are more likely than women to vote Republican. Next, they set quotas for Republicans and Democrats to be interviewed, supposedly designed to reflect the electorate. According to Gallup, this electorate is 40% Republican and 33% Democrat, hence their respondents must be 40% Republican and 33% Democratic. You see where I'm going with this? Next, Gallup only polls those people who use landlines as their primary telephones, disenfranchising all those folks who use cell phones as their sole telephones. In the end we get a poll that does more to shape reality than it does to report it. By undercounting Kerry supporters, such polls undermine Democratic efforts to raise money and momentum while building up the bandwagon effect for the Republicans.

Meanwhile, Zogby International, a non-partisan polling agency with an almost dead-on track record for accuracy, polled New Yorkers on the eve of the Republican Convention, asking them if they believed U.S. government leaders had foreknowledge of the 9/11 attacks. Half of the New York City residents and 41% of the New York State residents polled believe our leaders "knew in advance that attacks were planned on or around September 11 th, 2001, and that they consciously failed to act." Wow. Zogby also chalked the presidential election up as a dead heat. Either New York is way out of touch with the rest of the country, Gallup is out of touch with Zogby, or Gallup and Zogby are polling in different countries. In any event, when it comes to politics, follow your heart – not the polls – and do the right thing.