

July 30, 2003

LOOKING BACK, THINKING AHEAD

It's been 30 years since Watergate, and it seems almost as long since the aggressive investigative reporting that characterized that era became more of a subject for the History Channel than any news network. PBS airs its nostalgic walk down memory lane tonight. And one of the reporters who was in the White House at the time sees parallels aplenty. Helen Thomas, the Dean of White House reporters who has been shuffled aside by the Bush press operation, sees connections to our present situation that go back to the days even before Watergate. She writes in her column for the Hearst newspapers:

“President Bush has a huge credibility gap stemming from his exaggerated rhetoric that led the United States to attack Iraq. The Bush hype recalls the Lyndon B. Johnson era when LBJ’s misleading statements and deceptions led us deeper into the disastrous Vietnam War. Johnson later acknowledged that public mistrust had doomed his chances for re-election in 1968. Trust and truth still go a long way with the American people when it comes to war and peace.

Although the Bush administration credibility gap looks more like the Grand Canyon, don’t expect the president to take the responsibility for any false claims. The week before last, he dodged the question on whether he would assume responsibility for the misleading allegations. In response, he continued to insist Iraq had sought a nuclear weapons program. “I take responsibility

for dealing with that threat,” he said sternly.

LIBERIA LANGUISHES

MEANWHILE the death toll mounts in Liberia while the world looks on clucking its tongue. BBC carried a statement of disgust by a humanitarian aid worker in Monrovia who asked: “What are they waiting for, to come in and count the corpses. A West African “survey team” has been dispatched. The US troop ships remain offshore “monitoring” the situation the way the FBI used to “monitor” racist attacks on civil rights workers in Mississippi, counting the blows but not intervening. There is a powerful appeal by a Liberian on this issue in the New York Times. It says in part: “It baffles Liberians that American soldiers would interfere where they are not wanted, and stay away from where they are.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/30/international/africa/30AFRI.html?th>

BLAIR BLATHER

IN England, the same problem pertains, only there the press is not asleep. A BBC report this morning on a Blair press conference pushed, prodded and fought to get a straight answer out of Tony B. All he would say is that he still believes their intelligence findings and that we must wait for the “Iraq Survey Group” to complete its work. This from one of the two world leaders who could not and would not wait for the UN inspectors to complete theirs.

My friend Ziba writes from Blimey to report that some media outlets are suggesting that Dr. David Kelly's suicide can be attributed to his being a Bahai, which is now being pictured as a dangerous cult in some quarters. Funny how that line of demonization disseminated by the Mullahs in Iran are now being trotted out in Christian England.

WMD'S IN KABUL?

JOINT Chiefs of Staff chief, General Richard Meyer, was in Afghanistan denying that Iraq War stole any resources away from the US effort in Afghanistan. He gave two reasons why the US is there and will stay. A) To deny sanctuary to terrorists; B) To keep terrorists from obtaining weapons of mass destruction. Note the constant use of the T word – terror. This amidst alarmist stories that airplanes are about to be hijacked. Watch those stories carefully for any signs of evidence.

This is the first time I heard any suggestion that there were WMDs in Afghanistan. As the rationales shift, some in the press become more outspoken here as well. NY Times columnist Maureen Dowd took out her scalpel after Mr. Wolfowitz today:

DOWD ON THE WOLF MAN

"BRAZENING out the failure to find the Saddam-Qaeda links and W.M.D. the administration aggrandized before the war, Mr. Wolfowitz has simply done an Orwellian fan dance, covering up the lack of concrete ties to the 9/11 terrorists with feathery assertions that securing "the peace in Iraq is now the central battle in the war on terror."

"It is a new line of defense that was also used by Dick Cheney in a speech last week ("In Iraq, we

took another essential step in the war on terror") and by the president in a speech on Monday ("And our current mission in Iraq is essential to the broader war on terror; it's essential to the security of the American people").

"Even now that it's clear the Bushies played up the terror angle because they thought it was the best way to whip up support for getting rid of Saddam, the administration refuses to level with the public."

AL JAZEERA RESPONDS TO WOLFOWITZ WHINE

WOLFOWITZ came under attack from another quarter as well: Al Jazeera says he and other Administration biggies are harassing their news gathering efforts. Reports the Independent: "A day after Paul Wolfowitz, the US Deputy Defense Secretary, claimed that the Arabic Al-Jazeera television channel was "inciting violence" and "endangering the lives of American troops" in Iraq, the station's Baghdad bureau chief has written a scathing reply, complaining that in the past month his offices and staff in Iraq "have been subject to strafing by gunfire, death threats, confiscation of news material, and multiple detentions and arrests, all carried out by US soldiers".

A NEW FRONT IN THE PROPAGANDA WAR

JUST as Editor and Publisher reports that the grievances of many of those soldiers are being given attention, a counter-offensive is emerging. E&P reports: "As U.S. military casualties in Iraq increase, many newspapers are focusing on a growing discontent among soldiers and the protests of some of their families back home. Just "coincidentally it appears that some officers are

being encouraged to write to their churches and home town newspapers offering a far rosier view of what is happening in Iraq. Here's part of one such communique sent to a Lutheran Church in Richmond Beach and passed on to your news dissector. It's from "ERIC RYDBOM MAJ. ENGINEER Deputy Division Engineer 4th Infantry Division"

He writes in part: "The United States and Britain are doing a very noble thing here. We stuck our necks out on the world chopping block to free a people. I've already talked the weapons of mass destruction thing to death, bottom line, who cares, this country was one big conventional weapons ammo dump anyway. We have probably destroyed more weapons and ammo in the last 30 days than the US Army has ever fired in the last 30 years (Remember, this is a country the size of Texas), so drop the WMD argument as the reason we came here (or the reason Clinton said he had bombs dropped in that area) if we find them GREAT, if we don't, SO WHAT?"

SO WHAT?

SO what? I will tell you so what. No I won't. You already know. Meanwhile, we are still trying to determine the real reasons for the war. And others who want more info about 9/11 were told by the government that it will NOT declassify 28 pages in the Congressional 9/11 report. The reason – don't laugh – to keep Terrorists from getting it. Interestingly, the Saudi Arabian government is demanding the information be made public and is unleashing a public relations offensive. Watch for Saudi diplomats all over US TV.

PR Watch reports that the Saudis have hired a big PR firm to place their people on all the news shows. "Qorvis Communication is helping Saudi

Arabia lash out at critics who believe the 'blacked-out' section of the Congressional 9/11 report exposes the Kingdom's involvement in the terror attacks," O'Dwyer's PR reports. "The Bush Administration demanded that the 28-page section dealing with the role played by Saudi Arabia and other governments in 9/11 be omitted from the 900-page report." Qorvis has a \$200,000 a month contract with the Kingdom for PR work. Saudi Arabia spent \$288,000 at Patton Boggs – a well-connected D.C. lobbying firm and a Qorvis affiliate – for scheduling and accompanying Embassy officials to meetings with Members of Congress and their staffers, according to a February 2003 O'Dwyer's story." O'Dwyers covers the PR industry.

Just as President Bush said NO to requests for declassification, Ariel Sharon said no yesterday to demands that he take down the GREAT WALL OF ISRAEL, his so-called Security fence that makes the Berlin Wall look like a picket fence in someone's back yard. Has anyone noticed how all the efforts to insure Security end up fostering insecurity.

ORWELL CITED AGAIN

IN her column today, Maureen Dowd coins the phrase Orwellian fan dance. Up in Toronto, columnist Eric Margolis offers a guide to how our language is being distorted. "It's very difficult keeping up with Mideast news due to the Orwellian newspeak coming from Washington. So here's a handy list of key terms, translated into simple English, of the Orwellian newspeak coming from Washington.

* Liberation – Invasion.

* Coalition – The U.S. and British invaders, plus some troops from rent-a-nations like Roma-

nia and Poland. In the past, “the coalition” would have been called imperial forces and mercenary auxiliaries.

- * Dictator – A ruler you don’t like, or who does not cooperate.

- * Statesman – A cooperative dictator.

- * Uranium – a yellowish mineral from Niger that causes red faces in the White House..

- * Uday and Qusay – Yes, Saddam’s boys were big-time delinquents, but Crazy Uday’s biggest mistake was probably making fun of George W. Bush in his newspaper, calling the prez a draft-dodging wimp. Perhaps that’s why he and Qusay got the multi, anti-tank missile treatment - Texas justice - rather than a nice show trial in Baghdad.”

As for U & Q, Saddam has released a new audio tape calling them martyrs.

BET ON THIS

WHEN the US government announced its bizarre Policy Analysis Market yesterday morning, Carol Collins of CNN predicted it wouldn’t last. She was right. It was gone and the website we told you about is no more. However some peace activists have archived it if you missed it, Chris Jencks explains:

“An embarrassed DOD has pulled the Policy Analysis Market (PAM) website. This link no longer works

<http://www.policyanalysismarket.org/>

“Fortunately, for anyone who has not seen these yet, I was able to download and save two key pages – the concept overview and the list of involved organizations – before they yanked it. We’ve posted these as screenshots. I was also able to post a text copy of their page on how to become a PAM trader. The PAM site is wiped off

Google, but I was able to resurrect the trader text from a Google cache.

“The above are found on our homepage at <http://traprockpeace.org>

“We also have links to helpful articles, and a little research. The PAM site was registered on March 12, 2003; Network Solutions, Inc. is the Registrar. We’ve posted an intriguing article from June 24, 2002 – ‘War Dividends’ that references this project as a grant from Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) to Net Exchange. It’s not clear that the original intent was to set up a publicly traded Futures Market. The article focuses on predictions that hi-tech companies will profit from 9/11, with discussion of the economic prospects of smart ID cards (perhaps for virtually everyone in the US) and surveillance technologies such as data mining.”

MERLE CHALLENGES THE MEDIA

THE LA Times reports: “Singer Merle Haggard just may be the best country songwriter since Hank Williams. But this “poet of the common man” is unlikely to get his songs played on commercial country stations because his point of view often is too out of sync for broadcasters content to peddle feel-good entertainment.

“Haggard isn’t the only voice in danger of being pushed off the airwaves as a result of consolidation in the radio industry. In a July 8 Senate Commerce Committee hearing, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) questioned how long it would take increasingly powerful executives to pull controversial politicians and muzzle talk show hosts discussing abortion, war, the economy or other tough issues.

“As if on cue, Haggard has weighed in with “That’s the News,” a tune that nicks big media

firms for parroting the Bush administration contention that major fighting in Iraq has ended: "Suddenly it's over, the war is finally done; soldiers in the desert sand still clinging to a gun. No one is the winner and everyone must lose. That's the news." Rock and Rap Confidential reports that on Haggard's web site is the message: 'Don't let the media scare you to death...pray for the return of freedom.'

He also writes: "I don't even know the Dixie Chicks, but I find it an insult for all men and women who fought and died in past wars when almost the majority of America jumped down their throats for voicing an opinion. It was like a verbal witch-hunt and lynching. "And this from the man whose "Okie from Muskogee" song was an anthem for cheerleaders for the Vietnam War.

THE RIGHT WING MIND

THOSE who used to love Haggard will no doubt turn on him. Which leads to questions on the psychological make up of political conservatives. Here is a study out of the University of California at Berkeley: "Politically conservative agendas may range from supporting the Vietnam War to upholding traditional moral and religious values to opposing welfare. But are there consistent underlying motivations?

"Four researchers who culled through 50 years of research literature about the psychology of conservatism report that at the core of political conservatism is the resistance to change and a tolerance for inequality, and that some of the common

psychological factors linked to political conservatism include:

- * Fear and aggression
- * Dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity
- * Uncertainty avoidance
- * Need for cognitive closure
- * Terror management

"From our perspective, these psychological factors are capable of contributing to the adoption of conservative ideological contents, either independently or in combination," the researchers wrote in an article, "Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition," recently published in the American Psychological Association's Psychological Bulletin."

AN SOS FROM RADIO FOR PEACE INTERNATIONAL

ON Monday, July 21, 2003, a University for Peace representative delivered an eviction notice to Radio For Peace International (RFPI) which has been operating since 1987 by mutual agreement on the University campus in El Rodeo, Costa Rica. The radio station's access gate was locked with chains and patrolled by armed guards employed by the University for Peace. In addition, the radio station was advised to vacate its facilities in two weeks.

"This is more than an eviction, this is about the right to free speech," says James Latham, Chief Executive Officer of Radio for Peace International. "What is most shocking and sad is that this action comes from an international peace organization."

