

June 04, 2003

TALKING PEACE BY THE RED SEA

The talks are under way alongside the Red Sea as the latest peace initiative gets underway. The Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazin is expected to call for an end to the intifada. Ariel Sharon will endorse a Palestinian State along “contiguous lines,” which translates as: some settlements will have to go. As usual, BBC offered a series of perspectives including an interview with a young Palestinian-American sounding expert from the International Crisis Group (as opposed to the usual, Beltway think tank or former US official) who outlined the obstacles with great clarity. He wondered as many on all sides of this conflict do, if peace will be allowed to break out. Suspicions and propaganda continue to cloud the air.

What happens now? Israeli novelist David Grossman, author of *Death as a Way of Life: Israel Ten Years After Oslo* posed some of the problems in an article from an Israeli newspaper reprinted yesterday in the *Los Angeles Times*: “Even though experience has taught us that Ariel Sharon must be judged by his actions and not by his words, it may well be that his words last week set in motion a process that Sharon could not have envisioned. He may have intended to do no more than get on the good side of international public opinion, or he may have been serious. But whatever his intentions, his words have roused strong feelings. He has been accused of being a left-winger – a traitor even – by his colleagues in the Likud Party. Senior right-wing Cabinet ministers

have accused Sharon of pushing Israel toward something more dangerous than the Oslo accords, which were until last week the most despicable thing they could think of.

“What was it that Sharon said? In an emotional speech to his Cabinet, he declared explicitly, for the first time, that Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories was bad, that it was unsustainable, that Israel could not indefinitely rule over 3.5 million Palestinians and that Israel should not remain forever in Nablus, Jenin, and Bethlehem.

“Sharon was the architect of Greater Israel. He was the real force behind the construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Immediately after the Six-Day War of 1967, he began planning a map that would place settlements in locations designed to prevent any future Israeli accord with the Arabs. He virulently attacked Yitzhak Rabin when the latter began to shake off Israel’s dream of permanently occupying the territories. Yet it is Sharon who has, in the last week, single-handedly shattered the historical ideology of the Israeli right. Staunch conservatives are now in a state of shock, unable to believe that it is Sharon who has knocked them down.”

“ANTHRAX MOUNTAIN”?

WHILE CNN was running a story this morning on the best bottled waters, Fox was cheering our hearts with some pictures of the reopening of an amusement park for children. Weatherman Steve couldn’t resist cracking a “joke” about a ride there

called “Anthrax Mountain.” What will happen to this crew when they don’t have Saddam to kick around.

Dan Kennedy in Phoenix and many others are still kicking around the missing weapons of mass destruction. He reports from Bean Town: “If Saddam didn’t have WMDs, why didn’t he prove it? We should all be outraged by the Bush administration’s untruths as to whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Saddam’s alleged chemical, biological, and nascent nuclear capabilities were, after all, the principal argument offered by the White House for going to war in the first place.”

Still, this is a bit more complicated than some elements of the anti-war left would have it. Last night, Newsweek’s Michael Isikoff appeared on The David Brudnoy Show, on WBZ Radio (AM 1030), to talk about his latest article, regarding the way US officials bent intelligence to suit their needs. That’s how the phony stories about the aluminum tubes and the uranium from Niger made their way into the public consciousness.

MAUREEN DOWD: ‘\$%&*#.’

NEW YORK TIMES wordsmith Maureen Dowd takes out her scalpel to attack this issue this morning as well reporting: “As Secretary of State Colin Powell prepared to make his case for invading Iraq to the U.N. on Feb. 5, a friend of his told me, he had to throw out a couple of hours’ worth of sketchy intelligence other Bush officials were trying to stuff into his speech.

“U.S. News & World Report reveals this week that when Mr. Powell was rehearsing the case with two dozen officials, he became so frustrated by the dubious intelligence about Saddam that he tossed several pages in the air and declared: “I’m not reading this. This is ‘\$%&*#.’”

“First America has no intelligence. Then it has \$%&*# intelligence.

“So this is progress?

“For the first time in history, America is searching for the reason we went to war after the war is over.”

WEAPONS, SHMEAPONS

WHAT’S depressing of course is now a majority of the American people have been convinced that the presence of weapons doesn’t matter. They want to believe President Bush acted wisely. Meanwhile Hans Blix has released another on the one hand, on the other report in UN-ese saying there are still questions. Wow, there’s a stunner.

We have also been told that the CIA is investigating. Reports the Times: “The C.I.A. review will determine whether American intelligence miscalculated the extent of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein’s weapons programs.” This seems to be as good a way of saying that no one will be held accountable for the deceptions and lies.

ON JOURNO DEATHS: INVESTIGATIONS DEMANDED

IN the Village Voice, Cynthia Cotts calls for media companies to back an investigation of possible war crimes in the killing of journalists: “In a display of independence from the government, U.S. media companies should join CPJ in pressuring the Pentagon to produce a full account of the killings. With so many war stories now in question and media credibility at a record low, it’s time for news professionals to get back to where they once belonged: distrusting public officials and providing accurate information to citizens so they can make informed decisions. Defending the rights of non-embedded media in wartime would

be a good first step.

Writing in the NY Observer, writer Ron Rosenbaum calls for more inquiries into the death of Wall Street Journal reporter Danny Pearl in Pakistan: “There are questions about the crime itself that still have to be resolved, old questions such as: Just what story was Danny Pearl pursuing that led him to risk his life? And new questions have also emerged, about who really gave the order for Daniel Pearl’s murder, and about the meanings that have been projected upon his death and upon his final words in the horrific videotape made of his slaughter.”

“I recall when I was briefly executive-editing a journalism review some years ago (it was called MORE), we covered the case of an investigative reporter, Don Bolles, who was murdered in Phoenix for getting too close to the truth about financial and political corruption there. In the aftermath of his death, when it looked like the authorities were not too anxious to get to the bottom (or reach to the top) of it, a task force of investigative reporters from all over America (led by Newsday’s Bob Greene) descended on the state and investigated the hell out of the story, and made life hell for those behind the murder. (The most important thing, to paraphrase the great Eric Ambler, is not to find the one who fired the gun, but to find the ones who paid for the bullet.) I could be wrong, but I don’t recall a similar mobilization after Danny Pearl was killed – although admittedly, Pakistan is a lot more dangerous than Phoenix.”

NEWS NOT IN THE NEWS

BELIEVE it or not, see it or not, there are important stories happening around the world that get little attention on this June 4th anniversary of the

Tiananmen Square uprising. The Mail and Guardian reports from Harare that “Zimbabwe’s anti-government strike kept the country at a standstill for the second day yesterday with fewer reports of public demonstrations in the face of a massive show of force by army and police.”

CLEAR CHANNELIZATION

IN the media news, the Senate Commerce Committee will be grilling FCC commissioners today on their recently passed rule changes. The Conservative News Service Reports: “Critics Vow to Fight ‘Clear-Channelization’ of Television.” Jeff Johnson reports:

“Critics of new Federal Communications Commission rules allowing greater consolidation in broadcast media ownership vowed to fight the changes both in the courts and in Congress. But supporters of the new rules argued that Congress and the federal courts are responsible for forcing the commission to alter its rules.

“Political activist Rev. Jesse Jackson called the FCC rollback on cross-ownership limits ‘a major blow to democracy.’

“We must now seek from our Congress and from our courts rescue from this decision,” Jackson said, “which is not in the best interest of the broad base of the American people.”

“Brent Bozell, founder and president of the Parents Television Council, warned in a statement that the FCC had ‘opened a Pandora’s Box of indecency and violence, that would permeate broadcasting.’”

WHO BENEFITS?

REUTERS reported on the media companies who LIKED the FCC decision: “(The new rules) anticipate, to some degree, this big rush of consol-

idation,’” said Peter Mirsky, analyst at Fahnstock & Co. ‘I don’t think it’s going to happen but it sets the perception of a possible merger frenzy.’”

Shares of conglomerate Viacom Inc. gained 3 percent, while shares of News Corp.’s Fox Entertainment Group climbed 4 percent. TV station group Hearst-Argyle Television Inc.’s shares rose nearly 3 percent and Sinclair Broadcast Group Inc. shares gained 4.7 percent. Officials from News Corp., Walt Disney Co., and Viacom welcomed the move, noting that it is a step toward recognizing the changes in the current media landscape with cable, satellite, and the Internet.

CRONKITE: “I AM A DAMN FOOL.”

86-YEAR-OLD Walter Cronkite says he is getting back into the fray and will write a syndicated newspaper column. “I don’t know why, I’m a damn fool, I guess. The stock answer is that I am interested in what’s going on in this world of ours, and I spent my lifetime reporting it in one form or another. And in the time I have available, this will give me an opportunity to do this sort of thing. I don’t know if I have that ability or whether I’m a good enough writer to influence people. But if I am, perhaps I can do some good things in the world.”

YOU LEAK, YOU PAY

IN Serbia the government is considering a new media law that will prevent selective leaking of information. According to wires services there “it stipulates that state bodies of power must not favor any individual journalist or media company by exclusively revealing information, granting access to a document containing public information or supplying copies of such documents.

“State body employees will be subjected to a fine of between 30,000 and 300,000 dinars if they are deemed to have “violated the principles of equality; discriminated against a journalist or media company; failed to grant access to true and complete information (i.e. failed to permit access to a document containing such information), or failed to issue journalists or media companies with copies of such documents in the language in which the request was made.”

THE MEDIACHANNEL MAILBOX

HERE’S an anonymous but thoughtful letter: “Danny, the news is so awful lately, especially the nasty vote on the media rules, that I sometimes can’t stand it. I don’t want to read the paper, or listen to NPR, or read the weblog. I want to close my eyes real tight and pretend it isn’t so. Our making war on Iraq was bad, but at least there were others who didn’t want war, and we could go down the federal building to protest, and hang out with other people who didn’t like the idea of dropping bombs on a poor nation just because we could. For the everyday general worsening of things and the slow loss of our democracy who do we have for mutual support? I get stuff from TrueMajority and our local protest group but most of that is also despairing news. It feels so hopeless. Do you get this feedback from others too? Meaningful activism would help but my god, we’re all busy working. Thirty years ago families could get by having one wage earner, now we need two per family, which leaves us no time for effective advocacy except the occasional e-mail. Arrgh! That is, if we’re lucky enough to have a job.

Barbara Cornett writes: “I read an article by you at <http://www.alternet.org/story.html?Sto->

ryID=16047 calling for a tribunal for US media for their selling of the Iraqi war and I wanted to tell you about articles that I have read where there is precedent for holding the media responsible for propaganda and selling war.

“It happened at Nuremberg where journalists who were not part of Hitler’s inner circle were tried and executed for the role they played in selling the holocaust. I believe that Bush took us into an Iraqi holocaust and I want him tried in the International Court in The Hague along with those in his administration and the people in the media who aided and went along with him.

Here are the links to Nuremberg. I hope you can use them and please know that you are appreciated for what you are doing in trying to get the truth to the public.

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/mar2003/stre-m25.shtml>

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/apr2003/nure-a16.shtml>

IN PRAISE OF TERRIBLY IMPORTANT WORK

GERALD NELSON wrote: “Just a note to tell you how terribly important I believe your work is, towards the return of our democracy. I read on another site where someone was working on getting some of the heavy-weight sites like yours to combine. And be called: “The 13 original cyber colonies” or something like that. What do you

think. One more thing, it is my view that the REAL problem in this present day is our “corpocracy.” I strongly recommend the book, “Defying Corporations – Defining Democracy,” a product of PROCLAD.

SHAME ON THE NEW YORK TIMES

PETER ORNE forwarded me this letter that he sent to the New York Times. Anyone think they will publish it? “In the run-up to Monday’s decision by the FCC to ease media ownership rules prohibiting a single company from operating TV, newspaper, radio and cable in a single US city, The New York Times mostly buried the story in the back pages of the business section, with the exception of a lead story claiming that easing the rules would not matter very much.

“The New York Times Co. made more than \$20 million from 129 hours of programming on its NYT-TV operation last year. As far back as 1999, Arthur Sulzberger, chairman of the New York Times Company, named four goals for the following ten years, including television as a brand extension.

“Shame on The New York Times newspaper for its muffled coverage of a major media ownership story with potentially serious long-term implications for our democracy.”

