

May 27, 2003

HERE COMES THE SUN

Spring, missing in action for weeks now, has surfaced in New York City. The sun is out even as the temperature remains more Fall-like. Summer, we are told is just a few weeks away. Like the news and the world around us, it's hard to predict what will happen next and when. Despite homeland security, we are more insecure than ever. Last Friday, when I went up to ABC News for an interview that was aborted when the technology mysteriously failed, we were kept safely outside the building – “for security reasons,” of course. Guards had to phone upstairs as added personnel, with glocks at the ready, stared me down. The lobby had to be protected. Outside, police cars sat waiting for who knows what.

REALITY IS SPELLED REALTY

HERE at Globalvision Headquarters, we wait for the moving trucks, as our last week in Times Square gets underway.

We used to joke that if you wanted to know which neighborhoods in New York would be hot with the real estate crowd (reality is spelled realty in this city), just watch us. We began our company and the media crusade it became associated with back in 1987 in Soho, then the “artists” neighborhood. We were in a small dump of a building above a bar which was always managing to burn its burgers and send the smells wafting into our small digs. Within a few years, Soho became hotter than hot as a Euro destination and center of the new “hipoisie.” We had to move.

The next office was on Park Avenue South in a

nondescript office building that was soon modernized to entice the publishing and advertising industries that must have heard that we were there. Sure enough, rents rose and after a short stint, we were pushed out to new frontiers. As is often the case in New York, one of our staffers “knew someone,” the manager of the building we have fought with for 11 years. When we came here, there were porn theaters next door and across the street. No respectable company wanted to have its customers walk by a marquee that said “Butts on Fire.” That was fine with us, because the rents were low.

But as Times Square changed with the times, the porn biz moved out, replaced by another obscenity: Disneyfication, malling, and a media company invasion. Soon, property values escalated along with the brand name shops and investment banks. We held on, always feeling as if we were the absolute antithesis to the media monstrosities down the block. But time and expired leases caught up with us. We will soon be gone, moving ten blocks south into what was the aging garment district. Buy now, folks. If history is any guide, an area once known for sweat shops and worse will be coming back. Globalvision has arrived.

TARGETING IRAN

WATCHING Fox News this morning, got me ready for the next war. Tehran is now the target said the graphic, and so it must be so. One of the Fox Friends laid it out clearly: “We are pretty good at destabilization once we put our mind to it.”

This follows a report in the Washington Post on Sunday that Iran is in the cross hairs. Quote: “U.S. Eyes Pressing Uprising In Iran Officials Cite Al Qaeda Links, Nuclear Program.”

Glenn Kessler writes: “The Bush administration, alarmed by intelligence suggesting that al Qaeda operatives in Iran had a role in the May 12 suicide bombings in Saudi Arabia, has suspended once-promising contacts with Iran and appears ready to embrace an aggressive policy of trying to destabilize the Iranian government, administration officials said.

Senior Bush planners meet today to sharpen their strategy for what may be the next confrontation. The Post quotes one official who fears: “We’re headed down the same path of the last 20 years,” one State Department official said. “An inflexible, unimaginative policy of just say no.”

DEATH TOLL RISES IN IRAQ

IN Iraq, a low-intensity war has replaced the hot one. Another US soldier down today following another yesterday. There are two iron laws in effect: Occupation always breeds resistance, and military operations have high accident rates. Reported the Washington Post: “They’re Still Dying – One Almost Every Day.” Before the recent incidents, the story notes, “23 U.S. soldiers, airmen and Marines have lost their lives since President Bush declared on May 1 that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended.”

TURNING AWAY FROM CASUALTIES

AND what of the other dead? Author Christian Appy writes on the History News Network:

“We’ve turned away most obviously from the casualties. Of course, even during the race to

Baghdad the major networks gave little attention to Iraqi suffering, but they did at least keep a running tally of American casualties, offering profiles of just about every one of the initial fatalities. When the number of American dead reached 100 and U.S. troops helped topple the now famous statue of Saddam Hussein on April 9, the media stopped counting and looked elsewhere. The most recent numbers I can find come from mid-May. A reasonable guess is that by now perhaps 170 American military personnel have died in Iraq. This means that “postwar” fatalities, from every possible cause, may already exceed combat deaths during the war.

“As for the Iraqi military dead, it’s impossible to find an estimate. Even antiwar critics have concentrated mainly on civilian casualties. We know the total is in the “thousands,” but whether five, ten, or twenty thousand may never be determined. Somewhat more attention has been given to counting those war-related civilian deaths. Several sources, including a carefully reported count in the Los Angeles Times, put the figure in Baghdad at around 1,700 and rising. For the nation as a whole, 4,000 would probably be a conservative estimate. American officials refuse to calculate civilian deaths or to initiate an investigation of which ones were directly caused by the United States.

IS DEMOCRACY THERE DEAD TOO?

ALSO dead seems to be the move towards democratization in Iraq driven by grass roots involvement. Patrick Tyler reported in the Times: “The sudden shift in postwar strategy in favor of an American and British occupation authority has visibly deflated the Iraqi political scene, which ear-

lier this month was bustling with grass-roots politicking and high expectations for an all-Iraqi provisional government.

“This week Kurdish leaders are clearing out of Baghdad to return to the north to consult with their constituents about a course of action. They have asked the new American civilian administrator in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer III, to visit northern Iraq to confront the popular disenchantment.”

DREW: THE NEO-CONS ARE BEHIND IT

WRITING in the New York Review of Books, veteran Washington reporter Elizabeth Drew reviews the charges that Iraq was cozy with AL Qaeda – the kind of charges we are hearing today in regards to Iran:

“Iraq’s supposed ties to al-Qaeda have still not been proved; but Bush apparently became convinced that they existed. (Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, unhappy that the CIA and the Pentagon’s own Defense Intelligence Agency weren’t confirming their charges about Iraq’s ties to terrorist groups, set up their own intelligence group, one more likely to tell them what they wanted to hear.) By repeating the charge that Iraq was linked with international terrorism, the President and other officials succeeded in convincing nearly half the US public before the war that Iraq was involved in the attack on the World Trade Center. Several sources told me that if Cheney and his neo-con allies had had their way, the war with Iraq would have begun in the fall of 2002; they attribute the delay to success in convincing Bush to take his case to the UN and send inspectors to Iraq.”

SHARON NOW A PEACENIK

ARIEL SHARON was in New York this past weekend where his supporters were – what else – praising him. For weeks many had (at his instructions) opposed the so-called “road map to Peace.” Now that Sharon has shifted gears under US pressure, they are hailing him as a peacemaker. The Israeli prime minister is even condemning the occupation, a term which fervid backers of Israel always denied was accurate or appropriate. But now that Sharon uses it, it can no longer be dismissed as Palestinian propaganda.

While peacemaking is now in vogue, war making continues. There was a fresh attack on Hamas yesterday, which promoted new threats of armed attacks on Israel. Two stories on German television offered the kind of analysis missing on ours. Experts explained that the “road map,” which has so far produced road kill, is vague when specificity is called for. Deutsche Welle also investigated the training of Palestinian security forces and spoke with intelligence officials who all said that it will be impossible for them to disarm the Islamicists, as they called them, as long as Israel continues to create martyrs.

REPORTERS BEATEN

B’TSELEM, the Israeli human rights organization, wrote to the Israeli government demanding an investigation into the “severe beating” of two journalists: Sha’aban Qandil, a photographer for ANN, and Joseph Handal, a photographer for France 2. The beating was allegedly meted out by IDF soldiers in Beit Sahur last week.

In testimony given to a B’Tselem fieldworker, Qandil told the story: “We drove 200 meters [in a clearly marked press car] and then we saw two

army jeeps approaching us. The two jeeps stopped in front of our car and six soldiers got out. They approached our car and opened the driver's door. Joseph wanted to show them his press card and tried to speak to them in English, but the soldiers didn't let him speak or take out his ID. They took him out of the car and started hitting him immediately. Then they both dragged me out of the car and lay me on the ground. The two soldiers stomped on me and kicked me for five minutes.

B'Tselem says: "This incident is part of a widespread phenomenon of security force violence against civilians in the Occupied Territories. While the IDF claims to educate soldiers not to use unnecessary force, these programs are merely lip service rather than a genuine attempt to root out this problem."

THREE MILLION DEAD IN CONGO, WORLD YAWNS

CHECK out the New York Times online and you find a picture with this caption: "More than three million people have died in Congo's four-year-old war." A war that claimed three million lives as a caption. This shows clearly how wars and conflicts that the United States government wants no part of are also downplayed in the media. This war connects to all of us though. Many of its battles have been fought over control of Coltran, a resource used in the making of cell phones. More on this later.

Nicholas Kristof writes about this African tragedy today. Again, not as page one news but rather in an op-ed commentary. He writes about it because he had a personal connection to the country:

"In Congo, in which I've had a special interest

ever since Tutsi rebels chased me through the jungle there for several days in 1997, 3.3 million people have died because of warfare there in the last five years, according to a study by the International Rescue Committee. That's half a Holocaust in a single country.

"Our children and grandchildren may fairly ask, "So, what did you do during the African holocaust?"

"We are losing the battle against hunger," warns James Morris, the head of the World Food Program.

So it's time to rethink this continent. Africa itself has largely failed, and Western policies toward it have mostly failed as well."

TV HAS FAILED TOO

THERE HAS been a call for peace on the media front as well. Jason Gay writes in the NY observer, "We wish for peace in the Middle East – and on cable news. We've enjoyed the mean-spirited missile attacks between Fox News and CNN and MSNBC as much as anyone – probably more – but it's time to stop. Guys: You all have your positives and your negatives, and as great as you think you are, twice as many people watch an average episode of "8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter" than anything on your respective channels.

He also issues a call I can endorse: "We wish television news in general would stop being so crazed about being live. Live coverage is easily the most overrated journalistic innovation going. It's one thing if it's Ted Koppel by the Euphrates, but the vast majority of live coverage is merely "live from the scene where such-and-such happened a long time ago, and the only reason we're doing this is because we can." It'd be great if news organ-

izations cut their live coverage in half and devoted the saved resources to enterprise, investigative journalism.”

When I worked at ABC, these practices were called SLR – silly live remotes. News programs did them because they could. They had invested so much in the satellite trucks and the crews that they felt they had to use them.

PROTESTING CLEAR CHANNEL

Alternet reports that the women’s anti-war group, CodePink, is now crusading against media consolidation. Join CodePink this Thursday, May 29, for a protest at Clear Channel radio stations everywhere to stop the FCC from deregulating the media on June 2. Join planned protests and phone-in campaigns in Washington DC, San Francisco

and Los Angeles or contact your local CodePink for details on protests in your area: http://www.codepinkalert.org/Get_Involved!_Stop_the_FCC.shtml

Finally, a quote from Bill Moyers commentary from his PBS program NOW on Friday night. “I like to think journalists are paid for candor, too; society needs to know what could kill us, whether it’s too many lies or too much pollution. Napoleon left instructions that he was not to be awakened if the news from the front were good; with good news, he told his secretary, there is no hurry. But if the news were bad, he said, “Rouse me instantly, for then there is not a moment to be lost.”

Think of journalism as a kind of early warning system – iceberg spotting in the choppy waters of democracy.

