

Baghdad on the Hudson - let the blitzkrieg begin

WITH a U.S. invasion of Iraq growing more probable by the day, many people are starting to visualize the unimaginable – the most sophisticated killing machine that history has ever known unleashed upon a crowded urban area. According to Pentagon plans reported by CBS, day one will look something like this: Three to four hundred cruise missiles, an amount equal to all those used in the entire 1991 Gulf War, will be launched against Baghdad as an opening salvo. On day two, the US will launch another volley of three to four hundred missiles, all aimed at Baghdad.

"There will not be a safe place in Baghdad ... The sheer size of this has never been seen before, never been contemplated before," one US military official boasted to CBS News as he described what the Pentagon has termed the "Shock and Awe" plan. Under Shock and Awe, the fireworks show opens up with the Grand Finale. According to Harlan Ullman, who helped to develop the plan, the devastation will be instantaneous, creating chaos and destruction, "rather like the nuclear weapons at Hiroshima , not taking days or weeks but in minutes."

The Pentagon's ultimate plan is to shock and terrorize the Iraqis into quick submission before the first American soldier even enters Baghdad . Ullman explains, "You get rid of their power, water. In two, three, four, five days they are physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausted..." This Blitzkrieg plan, however, is not new, being as old as war itself. Invading armies have always used any means at their disposal to terrorize

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targeted peoples. That's the nature of an invasion. The only new twist is that technology now allows mass mayhem and destruction to be administered safely from afar, like a cowardly sniper's bullet targeted upon an unsuspecting victim standing in a gas station or mall parking lot.

This strategy is called terrorism – terrorizing a civilian population by exposing them to vulnerability, loss, and ultimately, to death. It's what the terrorists did to us on September 11th and it should have no place in the 21st Century. No doubt xenophobes will give me grief for comparing New York to Baghdad , but the comparison is imperative.

New York on the Tigris

Soon after the first Gulf War began, I picked up a 1985 (January) copy of National Geographic for a quarter in a used book store. What caught my eye was a teaser on the cover, "The New Face of Baghdad." In true Orwellian style, propaganda changes with the times. In 1991, the Iraqis were demons, with myths about them eating zoo animals and tossing premature babies from their incubators being spread far and wide by the commercial media. In 1985, however, they were our friends, as the Reagan/Bush Administration armed Saddam Hussein's government with chemical and biological weapons for use against Iran . If the National Geographic can be counted on to do one thing, that's tow the official line – and no doubt the 1985 issue would show a modern secular Iraq that had all but disappeared from our 1991 media.

And it did. The article, written by William Ellis, shows a modern and prosperous city of new hotels, housing developments and shopping malls such as the Thulatha Market, where 30,000 shoppers each day engaged in the American passion of conspicuous consumption. It wasn't just the architecture that was "normal" by American standards. It was the culture as well. Conspicuously absent from the article was any mention of Saddam Hussein's vicious use of American-supplied chemical weapons against Iraq 's own ethnic minorities. Instead, we were treated with passages that supported cultural kinship between Americans and Hussein's government, as it waged a secularist battle against the demonized fundamentalist Iranians. Ellis writes:

"Women in Baghdad dress fashionably. They attend universities and hold some of the highest offices in the land. There are women engineers here, and woman pilots, doctors, architects, and lawyers. Overall, nationally, women now account for 25 percent of the work force. It is official doctrine of the Baath Party that women have full equality with men. On the other side is Iran , where it is reported, lipstick is removed from women by a swipe of cotton in which a razor blade is embedded."

In contrast to evil Iran , Ellis described Saddam Hussein's Baghdad as containing new

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neighborhoods rising up around the ancient city, such as Haifa Street with its "schools, clinics, parks, and entertainments centers, "built by "contractors from many nations." He described superhighways so modern that, "Indeed, a motorist here might imagine himself in Germany ..." Ellis made much of the fact that unlike "other large cities of the Middle East ," bus passengers "ride inside the buses," where were British built London style double deckers. Soon, he promised, they'd be whisked along in a new modern subway system. For me, these signs of normalcy past now provide a vibrant image of horror – of a modern city bombed, in 1991, into what the US media has termed, "the stone age." Most upsetting was this caption, placed next to a photo of a woman engineer holding blueprints and wearing a short sleeve shirt and a hard hat, giving direction to a construction foreman. It read:

"New York on the Tigris, Baghdad and its building boom have attracted top-rate architects from Europe and the United States , who have reshaped the skyline. New construction includes the Haifa Street housing project, a community of nearly 2,000 high-rise units; the 312 room Sheraton Hotel, one of five luxury hotels built in the past five years; and housing project Number 10, one of several new developments that will provide low-rent living space."

Ellis is quick to point out that while Baghdad seems like an American city, it is set apart primarily by its rich archeology stemming from its 1,200 year history as a major center of trade. He writes: "There are other reminders – subtle to be sure – that this is, after all, Baghdad and not Milwaukee . It is not unusual for workers to uncover ancient and valuable artifacts while excavating for one of the many new buildings..."

With these images still fresh in mind, think again about 800 cruise missiles, collectively forming possibly the most powerful weapon of mass destruction ever used in warfare, raining down upon this urban area, upon these human beings.

The nuclear option

Then consider this tidbit from the L.A. Times, running under the headline, "U.S. Weighs Tactical Nuclear Strike on Iraq ." The article cites military sources and their plans to use "tactical" nuclear weapons either as possible retaliation for a biological or chemical attack, "or to preempt one." The article talks about the potential use of nuclear weapons to attack command bunkers, such as those under Baghdad . Now as you imagine the images of nuclear weapons exploding in or near Baghdad , think about George W. Bush describing the upcoming war as a war of liberation for the Iraqi people.

If the images of 800 Cruise missiles or maybe a nuke or two haven't horrified you, think about how those images will be perceived in our increasingly interconnected global

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community. Think about how the Muslims will perceive the image of a massive state-sponsored terror attack against what was the Islamic world's richest city. Then think about how Americans will be perceived around the world and what our role in this new world would be? And think about how these images will affect the disaffected, the hopeless, the next generation of suicidal terrorists. Or maybe just think. Historically such horror has never gone unpunished.

Now while you are thinking about how America will be perceived in the world, consider this recent report from The Observer in London . They report that the U.S. recently doubled its purchases of Iraqi oil, legal under the U.N. weapons for food program, in an attempt to contend with America 's worst shortage in oil stocks for 27 years. The oil shortage, brought on by Venezuela 's oil strike, is all but invisible to a U.S. awash in S.U.V. advertising. The irony of the U.S. buying Iraqi oil to stave off an energy crisis at the same time it is preparing to lob 300-400 Cruise missiles per day at Baghdad didn't escape The Observer, who termed the trade "bizarre."

"Open the spigot"

This bizarre trade, however, shows U.S. dependency on cheap and easily extractable Iraqi oil and foreshadows what many people around the world see as a U.S. takeover of Iraq 's oil fields. Current Pentagon war plans outlined in the American press call for the U.S. military to seize Iraqi oil fields early on in the war. Bush Administration Under Secretary of Commerce, Grant Aldona, cited in the British press, could hardly contain his jubilation, explaining how the upcoming war "would open up this spigot on Iraqi oil which would have a profound effect in terms of the performance of the world economy for those countries that are manufacturers and oil consumers."

Vice President Dick Cheney recently hosted meetings with representatives of ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco, ConocoPhillips and the company he formally led before being elected to the Vice Presidency, Halliburton. The topic of discussion was post-war oil concessions in a U.S. occupied Iraq . Richard Lugar, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has already threatened nations such as Russia , Germany and France , who oppose the Bush Administration's war, with being cut out of post-war Iraqi oil contracts. Those nations who support the war, by contrast, will share in the booty. The global business community is already making book on the war. The Observer cites a recently leaked Deutsche Bank analyst report that puts ExxonMobil, the 11th largest campaign contributor to the Republican Party, in a "pole position in a changed-regime Iraq ."

As CEO of Halliburton, Dick Cheney urged then President Bill Clinton in 1998 to launch an invasion of Iraq . He was joined in his letter by now Defense Secretary Donald

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Rumsfeld, his assistant Paul Wolfowitz, former CIA Director James Woolsey and a host of Republicans such as Elliot Abrams and William Bennett. Their invasion, part of a grand Pax Americana scheme they call "The Project for a New American Century," was dismissed in the 1990s as a radical call for empire by political extremists. Today they are running the government and their crazy plan for world domination is moving into gear.

The sober hawks

They're being opposed not just by the predictable clergy and movement for social responsibility, but by some of their more sober former comrades such as General Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of the first Gulf War, who wants to let the inspectors have more time before jumping into war. He told The Washington Post, "Candidly, I have gotten somewhat nervous at some of the pronouncements Rumsfeld has made," he explained, adding, "He almost sometimes seems to be enjoying it." General Brent Scowcroft, the former National Security Advisor, told the BBC and London Times that the upcoming war might unleash "an Armageddon in the Middle East ." U.S. Middle East Envoy General Anthony Zinni recently rebuffed pro-war forces who predicted that a U.S. Iraq war would lead to a more stable planet, telling the B.B.C., "I don't know what planet they're on." Zinni thinks Hussein would draw Israel into the war. What would happen next is anyone's guess, or nightmare.

Even the C.I.A., in their October threat letter, warned that "Should Saddam conclude that a U.S.-led attack could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions." Former Chief U.N. Weapons Inspector Richard Butler argued, "The spectacle of the United States, armed with its weapons of mass destruction, acting without Security Council authority to invade a country in the heartland of Arabia and, if necessary, use its weapons of mass destruction to win that battle, is something that will so deeply violate any notion of fairness in this world that I strongly suspect it could set loose forces that we would deeply live to regret."

There is clear evidence that while ExxonMobil and the American oil and automobile industries might want a war, much of the American business class has joined the more traditional peaceniks in opposing such immoral insanity. In a full page advertisement in the January 14th edition of The Wall Street Journal, a group of Republican business leaders wrote:

"Let's be clear: We supported the Gulf War. We supported our intervention in Afghanistan . We accept the logic of a just war. But Mr. President, your war on Iraq does not pass the test. It is not a just war. The candidate we supported in 2000 promised a more humble nation in our dealings with the world. We gave him our votes and our

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campaign contributions. That candidate was you. We feel betrayed. We want our money back. We want our country back.”

A few months ago I went to hear another prominent Republican speak out against the war. That was former U.S. Marine, intelligence operative, and U.N. Weapons Inspector Scott Ritter. He began his talk by talking about the mechanics of killing, giving a detailed description of how a bullet or a piece of shrapnel rips a human apart. He talked about the U.S. military as being the most powerful killing machine the world has ever known. And he explained how he was proud to have been part of that machine. How he was ready to lay his life down to defend the ideals of America . To kill or be killed, if necessary. And he explained how Saddam Hussein is a lying murderous bastard who could never be trusted. But he also explained that Hussein is contained. There is no evidence that he poses a threat any more. And certainly no evidence that he poses an immediate threat to us or anyone else. Then Ritter asked, “If you support this war, look at yourself in the mirror and ask yourself if you are willing to lay your life down to fight it? And if the answer is no, how can you ask someone else to?”

We’re being lead into war by a band now known as “The Chicken Hawks.” To a tee, they have all evaded military service. Yet they want to hijack the American military to kill and to die. They want to hijack it away from its ostensible goal to defend American values and use it as a tool of empire – corporate empire no less. And they want to commit crimes against humanity in our name. ●