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Please tell me again – what is this war about?

IF we're to believe the official rhetoric formally put forth by George W. Bush, Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and all, the US is now mired down in a bloody invasion of Iraq because that country has weapons of mass destruction – and because we have the right to take them away. Forget about the fact that there was no indication of Iraq posing a threat to the United States. And forget about the fact that such an invasion violates international law. And that such a "preemptive strike" threatens to destabilize the entire world, with the race now on in places like Korea to preempt preemptive strikes. Forget reality and forget common sense.

Let's just go with what we have. The US went to war ostensibly to rid Iraq, a nation of 24 million people now often simply referred to in the American press as "Saddam Hussein," of weapons of mass destruction.

Despite a host of false reports about weapons of mass destruction finds – all prominently reported in shouting headlines, only to be quietly retracted days later – there have been no weapons of mass destruction used in Iraqi attacks and no credible discoveries of such weapons. British Home Secretary David Blunkett went as far as to admit late last week that there in fact might not be any weapons of mass destruction in

Iraq – but he was still looking forward to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government nonetheless, weapons of mass destruction or not.

Back on March 17th, when George W. Bush in effect declared war on Iraq, giving Iraq's government 48 hours to flee their country, he mentioned "disarming" Iraq 11 times – using the UN mandate for Iraq to disarm as his rationale for threatening war, apparently in violation of international law and the will of the UN. Once the bombing actually began, however, finding and destroying Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction became priorities number two and number three on Donald Rumsfeld's list of eight war objectives. Removing Saddam Hussein from power became Bush's primary objective.

According to a report published by Reuters, by day 10 of the war, finding and destroying Iraqi weapons of mass destruction had slipped to fourth and fifth places on a list released by Pentagon spokesperson Victoria Clarke. Ridding Iraq of "terrorists" and "collecting intelligence on terrorist operations" became priorities number two and number three. Of course the only terrorist group discovered in Iraq, Ansar al-Islam, was operating out of the US/British controlled northern autonomous area – where they could have been routed at any time by US forces – but that's another story.

Orwell: We have always been at war with ...

For George W. Bush the rhetoric has become even simpler. Gone are his endless references to Iraqi weapons of mass destruction – weapons that American representatives from two successive waves of UN inspection teams claim never existed in the first place. In place of this rhetoric, Bush now speaks of "freeing the Iraqi people." The transcendence in dogma, especially over such a short period of time, is frighteningly Orwellian – with the now discredited supposed rationale for this three week old war all but forgotten. It no longer matters why we're fighting – we're at war, and hence, we have no time for such trivial questions. Of course outside of the fog of American media, no one else seems to be forgetting anything.

Yes, the rationale for the American invasion was to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. And no, there is no credible evidence that Iraq had them. But, and here's where it gets real ugly, there are weapons of mass destruction being deployed in this battlefield – by American troops. Once again there is evidence that US troops are using radioactive depleted uranium (DU) weapons in Iraq – weapons that have been classified by the UN as illegal weapons of mass destruction.

Former US Army Colonel and ex-director of the Pentagon's depleted uranium project, Doug Rokke, in an interview with the Scottish Sunday Herald, classified the American use of DU weapons as a "war crime." Rokke argued that American "double standards are

repellent," since "This war was about Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction – yet we are using weapons of mass destruction ourselves."

The Sunday Herald quotes a UN report issued in 2002, stating that the use of DU weapons violates laws and agreements protecting civilian populations in wartime. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the Genocide Convention, the Convention Against Torture, the Geneva Conventions of 1948, the Conventional Weapons Convention of 1980 and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 against the use of "poison or poisoned" weapons.

According to official Pentagon sources, the US left 320 metric tons of radioactive DU on the battlefields in Kuwait and Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War. This radioactive waste spread through the environment will eventually cause, according to the British Atomic Energy Authority, approximately 500,000 deaths. DU contamination is also, according to the UN, the most likely cause of the 1,000% rise in cancer and 400-600% rise in birth defects in Iraq since the first Gulf War. Veterans' rights activists in the US also believe DU is linked to the mysterious epidemic of birth defects and illnesses plaguing more than half of the children of Gulf War veterans born since the 1991 war.

Because of these horrific statistics, veterans groups, human rights organizations and peace activists around the world have joined together to condemn the use of DU weaponry, which is used to pierce the armor of tanks. Evidence of DU weapons use in the current war comes from a recent "friendly fire" incident which saw British troops hit by a DU armed shell fired from an American A-10 "tankbuster" plane. Regarding that incident, British forces in the field told the media that the American pilot was a cowboy, recklessly shooting his DU weapons irresponsibly at anything moving below.

War is hell – and this one certainly is no exception with reports from the battlefield – a host of heavily populated Iraqi cities – getting uglier. According to the Pentagon, "precision-guided" bombs have an accuracy rate of around 90%, or conversely, a failure rate of around 10%. Given that the US has so far launched 8,000 such bombs and missiles against Iraq, this translates to approximately 800 weapons veering off target. The resulting civilian carnage has been horrific, with over 1,000 deaths reported as of Monday (a counter displayed at http://mediastudy.com displays the current count and links to an incident database explaining each death).

Thanks for the cluster bombs

Civilians are also dying as a result of misdirected cluster bombs dropped by US and British forces. These bombs disburse small yellow bomblets which are the same color as the food packs currently being distributed to Iraqi civilians. British Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon

dismissed such deaths, declaring that the mothers of Iraqi children killed by these bombs will "one day" thank Britain for dropping them.

Iraqi civilians are also being killed by artillery and rockets fired by frightened US forces pinned down in firefights. In one highly reported incident, a US fighter, after accidentally killing an Iraqi woman, declared to the media: "I'm sorry, but the chick got in the way." Mark Franchetti, an embedded reporter writing for The Times of London, put faces on some of the dead, describing "a little girl, no older than five and dressed in a pretty orange and gold dress," who "lay dead in a ditch next to the body of a man who may have been her father. Half of his head was missing." Nearby, Franchetti reports, "in a battered old Volga [automobile], peppered with ammunition holes, an Iraqi woman – perhaps the girl's mother – was dead, slumped in the back seat. A US Abrams tank nicknamed Ghetto Fabulous drove past the bodies."

Franchetti cites one US Marine Lieutenant, in tears, lamenting the girl's death. But he also quotes another Marine at the scene by name, who tells him, "The Iraqis are sick people and we are the chemotherapy." That Marine went on to explain, "I am starting to hate this country. Wait till I get a hold of a friggin' [I suspect this is a sanitized British translation of "fuckin"] Iraqi. No I won't get a hold of one. I'll just kill him."

Franchetti, however, puts this apparent barbarism into a sad context, writing: "Only a few days earlier these had still been the bright-eyed small town boys with whom I crossed the border at the start of the operation." It was the insanity and horror of ground combat that was the "turning point," for these Marines. Franchetti described how they "lost all of their assumptions about the war and became jittery aggressors who talked of waiting to 'nuke' the place." "Before last week," he added, "few had even seen a dead body. Now their faces had changed."

American victims

This was the point of Franchetti's article – not to demonize the Marines blasting away with their machine guns at civilian cars – but to empathize with their pain and confusion as they're thrust into chaos. This is the other death – the one that is seldom reported – the death of the human spirit that goes along with killing. Two weeks ago these Marines were told that they would be greeted as liberators by surrendering troops. Despite an endless deluge of Associated Press images supporting this delusion, such as one that ran last Sunday showing an Iraqi man gifting flowers to an American soldier at a checkpoint, American forces were met with another reality. They were attacked from all sides, seemingly by everything that moved – and they shot back. And they kept shooting. And shooting. And calling in air strikes. And they are now drowning in a pool of blood.

They are Americans, 95% of whom hail from poor and working class backgrounds. They are both victims of an economic draft, and idealists who wanted to serve their country, only to find themselves in a military that has been hijacked to fight for a deranged and unobtainable vision of empire. Like the civilian bodies littering Iraq's roads and cities, these Americans are also victims of war – they will never be the same. The Bush administration, while hiding behind its "support our troops" rhetoric, is cutting their veterans' benefits at home while sending them deeper and deeper into harms way in Iraq – in a war for what?

World War Four

Perhaps this question is best answered by former CIA Director James Woolsey, who declared on April 3rd, that the US is currently fighting World War Four [presumably the cold war was number three] – which he declared "will last considerably longer than either World War One or Two..." He named Iraq's neighbors Syria and Iran as potential future targets, and issued a direct threat to American allies in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, stating: "We want you nervous. We want you to realize now, for the fourth time in a hundred years, this country and its allies are on the march and that we are on the side of those whom you – the Mubarak's [Egyptian President], the Saudi Royal Family – most fear: We're on the side of your own people."

Of course protests throughout the Arab world demonstrate that the destabilizing factor in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Jordan, Yemen and other countries with close ties to the US, is precisely those close ties to the US. This is the revolution that pro-American Arab leaders now fear – not a mythical groundswell of support for what most of the Islamic world now sees as a "crusade" or religious war against Islam.

It was George W. Bush's amateurish use of the word "crusade" when he launched his open ended "war on terror," that has united rival factions in the Arab and Islamic worlds in a Jihad against America – whom they see as launching a holy war against Islam. It was this poor use of language that united many of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi enemies – people who once welcomed the US into Iraq in 1991 – against the US invasion. Cultures don't forget wars of genocide. And that's what the original Crusades were.

America's holy war

And this is how many people in the Middle East view what Woolsey calls World War Four. They've taken George W. Bush at his world. It's a holy war. A crusade. Of course having fundamentalist groups such as In Touch Ministries distributing pamphlets like "A Christian's Duty in Time of War" to US troops in Iraq doesn't help dispel this image. The

pamphlet urges soldiers to fill out a form pledging to pray every day for George W. Bush, and "Pray that the president and his advisors will recognize their divine appointment..."

Evangelical Christian groups are now poised to enter Iraq, a country that is 98% Muslim, ostensibly to carry out humanitarian aid. Prominent among them is Reverend Franklin Graham's organization, Samaritan's Purse. Graham, the son of legendary evangelist Billy Graham, was a participant in George W. Bush's inaugural ceremony, offering a prayer for the new president. He also, during a televised NBC interview, dismissed Islam as "a very evil and wicked religion." He went on to declare that "The God of Islam is not the God of the Christian faith." And now he's entering Iraq on the tail of what will only be perceived as the Crusader's sword. Don't expect this war to end anytime soon.

But also don't give up. It's imperative for people to speak up now, lest the Bush administration send US forces to kill and be killed across the region. Stopping this supposed war without end is not only a matter of supporting American values, justice and the rule of law – it's also a matter of supporting the troops.

It's not too late to stop this insane evil war. ●

Stop the war now

CONGRESSMAN Dennis J. Kucinich (D-OH), who leads opposition to the War in Iraq within the House, ssued the following statement on the House floor (4/2/03):

"Stop the war now. As Baghdad will be encircled, this is the time to get the UN back in to inspect Baghdad and the rest of Iraq for biological and chemical weapons. Our troops should not have to be the ones who will find out, in combat, whether Iraq has such weapons. Why put our troops at greater risk? We could get the United Nations inspectors back in.

"Stop the war now. Before we send our troops into house-to-house combat in Baghdad, a city of five million people. Before we ask our troops to take up the burden of shooting innocent civilians in the fog of war.

"Stop the war now. This war has been advanced on lie upon lie. Iraq was not responsible for 9/11. Iraq was not responsible for any role al-Qaeda may have had in 9/11. Iraq was not responsible for the anthrax attacks on this country. Iraq did not tried to acquire nuclear weapons technology from Niger. This war is built on falsehood.

"Stop the war now. We are not defending America in Iraq. Iraq did not attack this nation. Iraq has no ability to attack this nation. Each innocent civilian casualty represents a threat to America for years to come and will end up making our nation less safe. The seventy-five billion dollar supplemental needs to be challenged because each dime we spend on this war makes America less safe. Only international cooperation will help us meet the challenge of terrorism. After 9/11 all Americans remember we had the support and the sympathy of the world. Every nation was ready to be of assistance to the United States in meeting the challenge of terrorism. And yet, with this war, we have squandered the sympathy of the world. We have brought upon this nation the anger of the world. We need the cooperation of the world, to find the terrorists before they come to our shores.

"Stop this war now. Seventy-five billion dollars more for war. Three-quarters of a trillion dollars for tax cuts, but no money for veterans' benefits. Money for war. No money for health care in America, but money for war. No money for social security, but money for war. We have money to blow up bridges over the Tigris and the Euphrates, but no money to build bridges in our own cities. We have money to ruin the health of the Iraqi children, but no money to repair the health of our own children and our educational programs.

"Stop this war now. It is wrong. It is illegal. It is unjust and it will come to no good for this country.

"Stop this war now. Show our wisdom and our humanity, to be able to stop it, to bring back the United Nations into the process. Rescue this moment. Rescue this nation from a war that is wrong, that is unjust, that is immoral.

"Stop this war now." ●