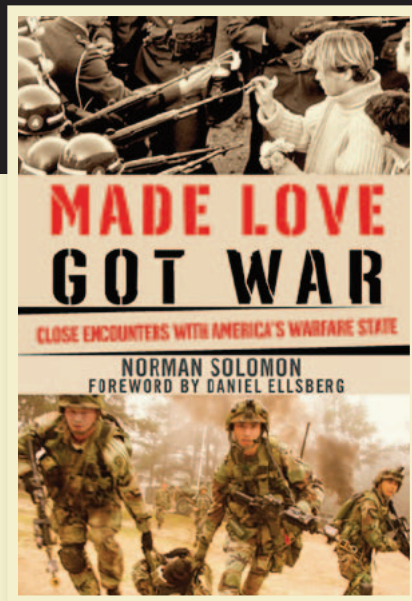


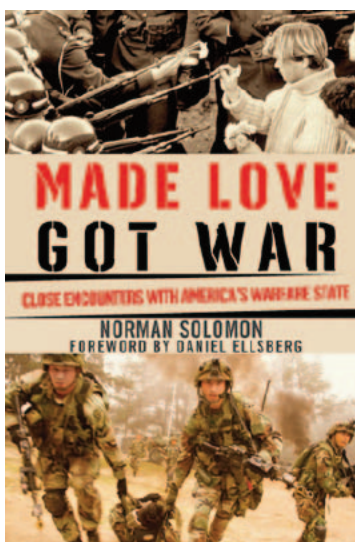
# GREASED PATH TO IRAQ

AN EXCERPT FROM THE NEW BOOK  
**MADE LOVE GOT WAR**  
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH AMERICA'S WARFARE STATE



**NORMAN SOLOMON**

ColdType



This is an excerpt – Chapter 10 – from **Norman Solomon's** latest book, ***Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State***, published by PoliPoint Press, of Sausalito, California.

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The authoritative word came that September 11 had “changed everything.” So it was unremarkable when, at the end of 2001, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* stated in an editorial: “The unspeakable, the unthinkable, the inconceivable horror of that day changed everything.” Meanwhile, the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* proclaimed: “Attack on the U.S. changed everyone and everything everywhere.” Perception as reality. Five years later, it was time-honored matter of fact, as when the *New York Times* led off a news article this way: “Before September 11 changed everything, President Bush wrestled publicly with the issue of embryonic stem cell research . . .”

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Not long after 9/11, I wrote a column urging that U.S. news media adopt a single standard for use of the “terrorist” label. If buildings and civilians are destroyed with planes or bombs in the service of a political agenda, I contended, then journalists should call it “terrorism”—or, if the word couldn’t be used evenhandedly in the journalistic voice, it shouldn’t be used at all.

In response I received an email from Jonathan Storm, the TV columnist at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, saying: “The media’s preoccupation with revenue has seeped into the editorial department of most newspapers. The feeling is that you fail to use this type of language at a peril to the bottom line.” Four years later, I asked Storm

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for permission to quote his comment. “Go right ahead,” he wrote back. And he added: “You put yourself in peril now if you fail to do certain types of stories, much less use certain types of language.”

For many years the global news agency Reuters had been refusing to use the words “terrorist” or “terrorism” as a reportorial judgment. But no major U.S. news outlet would follow suit. The American experiences and vantage points were at the core of objectivity. What Osama bin Laden ordered to be done with hijacked airliners was certainly terrorism—and, in mainstream U.S. media, what George W. Bush ordered to be done with gigantic bombs could be nothing of the kind. The implicit media message: *Don't even think about it.*

Post-9/11 fear became the key and the lock. A dream scenario for manipulation: we were attacked, and just about anything is justified as a reaction. With enough fear, any rationale might look appropriate.

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Partway through the summer of 2002, I realized that an invasion of Iraq was probably in the cards. The bellicosity from the White House wasn't the only big tip-off. Joseph Biden, the Democrat chairing the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, excluded invasion opponents from the list of witnesses for two days of hearings. The same committee that thirty-five years earlier had publicly scrutinized the rationales for the war in Vietnam was now playing ball with a president bent on using 9/11 fears to start a war in Iraq. I wrote a piece that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* in early August, decrying the committee's assist for launching an invasion. But I knew that op-ed articles would count for little.

Heightening my alarm was information from the Washington office of the Institute for Public Accuracy, which put out news releases warning against war on Iraq. Many policy analysts were challenging the momentum for an invasion, but war enthusiasts held the whip and dominated the media debate.

Clearly the Bush administration had no interest in talks with Saddam Hussein's regime. But when I discussed the situation with my colleagues at the Institute for Public Accuracy, we agreed that

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someone in Congress should break the ice. In late summer, the Institute contacted many congressional offices and offered to sponsor a trip to Iraq. A former U.S. senator, James Abourezk, helped with the outreach and committed himself to being part of a delegation. Finally, a member of the House agreed to take the political risk.

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We landed in Baghdad the night of September 13, 2002. Later, I wrote about our arrival at the Al-Rashid Hotel:

Television crews had staked out the front entrance. It was a little past two in the morning, and the lights from their cameras bathed the hotel's mosaic entryway with an eerie luminescence. At the curb, the congressman in the delegation hesitated, frowning as he looked at the entrance. Nick Rahall, a Democrat from West Virginia completing his thirteenth term in the U.S. House of Representatives, was a long way from home—the first member of Congress to set foot in Iraq during the presidency of George W. Bush.

Rahall eyed the TV cameras, and then looked once again at the marble mosaic. A sinister likeness of an earlier American president, George H. W. Bush, spanned the floor of the hotel entrance, along with tiles forming block letters that proclaimed "BUSH IS CRIMINAL." Carefully, the congressman edged sideways into the hotel lobby, screened by others to avoid the problematic photo-op.

Meetings with high-level Iraqi officials went well. And the American media coverage was mostly straightforward, in part because Congressman Rahall spoke carefully to avoid inflaming hyper-patriots back home.

I'd brought along a little book, *Neither Victims Nor Executioners*, by Albert Camus. "And henceforth," he wrote, "the only honorable course will be to stake everything on a formidable gamble: that words are more powerful than munitions." I showed that passage to a BBC reporter as we talked in my twelfth-floor hotel room—sitting at a large window with a panoramic view of a city that already seemed destined for heavy bombardment. I liked the quote, but the

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“formidable gamble” seemed like quite a long shot, no matter how much anyone wanted words to be more powerful than weaponry. The situation at hand in mid-September 2002 was a grim case in point. I was pessimistic, but not fatalistic. War amounted to organized violence, imposed from the top down. Stopping war meant nonviolence, percolating from the bottom up. War required widespread passivity, and peace depended on extraordinary activism.

While Rahall was en route back to Washington, the Baghdad government announced that it would allow U.N. weapons inspectors to return to Iraq. We’ll never know whether his visit had anything to do with the decision.

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*Late September 2002:*

It’s the morning when the “Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage” begins in Marin County. Fresh autumn beauty is stunning under Northern California sunshine. I’m dropping off two cyclists at the starting point, a retreat center named Spirit Rock, and the kickoff ceremony is inviting. A bald man in robes with a delightful sense of humor is on the slightly raised platform, next to a sculpture of the Buddha, talking about the two days ahead—definitely not a race—the cyclists will get there when they get there! (How Zen can you get?) He describes how geese fly together, in a V formation, and if one falls to the ground then others will swoop down to see what has happened, to find out if they can help. I try to keep the lovely image in my mind. But when I think of a V formation, what I see are planes over Baghdad, where I was last week, and I think of people there, no better or worse or more or less precious than anyone here, and I think of the carnage to come and what has become of the V formation.

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Only one more congressional trek to Iraq occurred during Saddam’s rule. I watched the TV coverage from home in early fall. Congressman Jim McDermott said during a live ABC interview from Baghdad, “I think the president would mislead the American people.”

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The comment set off angry denunciations from pundits and politicians who ripped into McDermott for impugning the integrity of George W. Bush while standing on “enemy” soil. After that uproar, the responses to invitations for travel to Iraq grew chillier on Capitol Hill, and even colder when the House and Senate voted in mid-October to approve a war resolution.

With all signs pointing toward an invasion, the odds seemed very long that any other member of Congress would jump into a media crossfire by visiting Iraq. At the Institute for Public Accuracy we widened the search to include other prominent Americans, such as celebrities in the arts, who might be willing to stick their necks out to help avert war.

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In late November 2002, inspections resumed in Iraq for the first time in four years. “U.N. weapons inspectors say Iraq has been cooperative,” Wolf Blitzer told CNN viewers on December 3, “but the Bush administration is by no means convinced. Many experts say what happens next depends on what happens this weekend. Sounding off now, from San Francisco, the syndicated columnist Norman Solomon, and here in Washington, Jonah Goldberg with National Review Online.”

BLITZER: The Bush administration would seem to be in an awkward position, if the Iraqis continue to cooperate, as they have been, at least during this first week.

SOLOMON: It is an awkward position when the Bush administration really does not want to take yes for an answer. We had the president saying that the signs are not encouraging. I think actually what is really discouraging is the stance of Bush and Cheney and the rest of the team which has been throwing cold water on what appears to be a surprisingly smooth, and so far very successful, inspection operation.

Now, I was in Baghdad in September, and at some meetings with Tariq Aziz and other Iraqi officials. It was clear that they were hesitant at that point to allow unfettered access. They

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have gone that extra mile, the presidential palace being inspected this morning, unprecedented access. Really, the U.N. inspectors having run of the country with very sophisticated surveillance equipment.

So I think the real question is whether the president means what he says when he said today he wants peace and security. It seems more likely from all indications that the administration wants war that will create great insecurity for the region and beyond.

BLITZER: All right. Jonah Goldberg . . . what Norman Solomon just said was why can't the Bush administration take yes for an answer from the Iraqis? They're cooperating. Why not leave it at that?

GOLDBERG: Well, it seems to me that the only reason we've had the progress that we have had so far is precisely because the Bush administration has taken a hard line, has shown that it is very serious about being committed to actually using force if necessary, including sending troops and equipment to the region, working out these deals. So Mr. Solomon [is] exactly right that the Bush administration is firmly intending to go to war no matter what, but even if it weren't firmly intending to go to war no matter what, it would have to take this line because this line is the only thing that got inspectors back in there in the first place.

BLITZER: Norman Solomon, he makes a valid point. If the Bush administration weren't making these threats, do you believe the Iraqis would be cooperating as they are?

SOLOMON: Well, I think they certainly are under pressure. I think what is clear and the key point now is that they are cooperating. They have gotten to this point, and it's enormous U.N. pressure as well, because the U.S. felt compelled to at least go through the Security Council.

I think it's very important, whether government officials or pundits or others are addressing this "use of force" question, which is a phrase that kind of rolls off the tongue. What are we talking about here? The Medact organization, a medical group, worldwide global health monitoring organization based in Lon-



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don, did a report last month saying that if a regime-change war is undertaken by the United States, the casualties—the deaths will range between 48,000 and 260,000. That's up to a quarter of a million people or more killed during the war or its immediate aftermath, and let me quote from the report. "The majority of casualties will be civilians." I think that's worth repeating: The majority of casualties will be civilians. Now, what kind of message is that from the Bush administration against terrorism and against violence for political ends?

BLITZER: Jonah Goldberg, do you accept that assumption in that report on these huge casualties, including a lot of children, if there were an effort to go forward with so-called regime change in Baghdad?

GOLDBERG: Frankly, I don't. I mean, I haven't looked at the exact report, and I think that there are a lot of groups out there that inflate a lot of these numbers precisely because they're against the war no matter what. We certainly heard a lot of that around on the table last time. Before the Gulf War, we were told there were going to be tens of thousands of casualties. But it would also be silly to say that there wouldn't be casualties. Of course, there would be. The question is whether or not you're willing to go through with this anyway. And to me, it seems like a legitimate thing to do . . .

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A few days into December—after fruitless months of inviting high-profile Americans to visit Baghdad—I received a call from Sean Penn's office. Moments later he was on the line: cordial, straightforward, and very interested in making the trip as soon as possible. I felt like I was getting a response to a note that I'd put in a bottle and tossed in the ocean.

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A moment of clarity came with fatigue and apprehension inside a plane circling Baghdad at dawn. Light had begun to filter through windows, just above puffy gray. While the jet descended into the

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clouds, a little Iraqi girl was in the row just ahead; Sean and I could hear her melodious voice. "When I start to wonder why I'm making this trip," he said quietly, "I see that child and I remember what it's about."

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*December 13, 2002:*

We're visiting the cancer and leukemia ward of the Al-Mansour Children's Hospital. The kids are on austere little beds, their dark eyes haunted, and haunting. "You don't even want someone to slam a *door* too loud around these children," Sean says, "let alone imagine a bomb exploding in the neighborhood."

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The same muzak as in September was looping through the Al-Rashid Hotel's sprawling lobby, still with frequent rotation of an instrumental version of a Moody Blues song from the *Knights in White Satin* album. In my subjective head (jet-lagged and free-associating) it was a surreal audio track, a washed-out melody that I'd often heard on the verge of low-grade hallucinations during the summer when I turned eighteen, in 1969, around the time President Nixon—proclaiming that "we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility for its defense"—announced what came to be known as "Vietnamization." (A year later, I. F. Stone wrote that the doctrine "will be seen in Asia as a rich white man's idea of fighting a war: we handle the elite airpower while coolies do the killing on the ground." And he predicted, "Not enough Asians are going to fight Asians for us even if the price is right.")

Now, visiting Baghdad close to the end of 2002, I had no expectation of the steps toward "Iraqization" that would come years later, but I did expect that a U.S. invasion would be coming soon, within months. The Moody Blues melody kept returning at medium volume, flooding much of the ground floor, which included a couple of restaurants with solicitous waiters and shops selling Iraqi souvenir knickknacks, including Saddam Hussein watches with Mr. Big's face

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on the dial, while in the entry area, near the inlaid tiles at the threshold still spelling out “BUSH IS CRIMINAL” (though a reference to Bush the elder, also foreshadowing), Iraqi men wearing checkered head-dresses sat on their haunches smoking a hookah, as if—so it seemed to me, anyway—waiting for something to happen yet in no particular hurry. To my eyes, the scene was a cross between *Arabian Nights* and the caterpillar episode of *Alice in Wonderland*, with international intrigue of *Grand Hotel* thrown in; but this was gruesomely real.

I looked at Iraqi people and wondered what would happen to them when the missiles arrived, what would befall the earnest young man managing the little online computer shop in the hotel next to the alcohol-free bar, who invited me to a worship service at the Presbyterian church that he devoutly attended; or the sweet-faced middle-aged fellow with a moustache very much like Saddam Hussein’s (a ubiquitous police-state fashion statement) who stood near the elevator and put hand over heart whenever I passed; or the sweethearts chatting across candles at an outdoor restaurant as twilight settled on the banks of the Tigris.

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*December 15, 2002:*

We sit at breakfast, pita bread and hummus on the table. Sean is writing a statement for the news conference, scrawling on a pad.

“I believe in the Constitution of the United States, and the American people,” he tells a room full of journalists and cameras a few hours later. “Ours is a government designed to function ‘of,’ ‘by,’ and ‘for’ the people. I am one of those people, and a privileged one.” Sean continues: “I am privileged in particular to raise my children in a country of high standards in health, welfare, and safety. I am also privileged to have lived a life under our Constitution that has allowed me to dream and prosper.” And then he says:

In response to these privileges I feel, both as an American and as a human being, the obligation to accept some level of personal accountability for the policies of my government, both those I support and any that I may not. Simply put, if there is a war or con-

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tinued sanctions against Iraq, the blood of Americans and Iraqis alike will be on our hands.

My trip here is to personally record the human face of the Iraqi people so that their blood—along with that of American soldiers—would not be invisible on my own hands. I sit with you here today in the hopes that any of us present may contribute in any way to a peaceful resolution to the conflict at hand.

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*December 16, 2002:*

Before dawn we land in Amman, and Sean dashes to catch a plane so he can get to Tennessee to start work on *21 Grams*. By now the denunciations are well underway back home—led by Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* and Fox News Channel, with other media outlets joining in.

I'm staying overnight in Amman. At the hotel a call comes in, inviting me to tape an MSNBC show via satellite. I end up in a makeshift studio, doing the interview with a program host who doubles as the news channel's editor-in-chief. Later I see the transcript of what MSNBC viewers heard:

JERRY NACHMAN, HOST: First question. From everything I have heard and read, Sean Penn has tried to be very measured in his public statements and his behavior in Iraq. Can you confirm that?

NORMAN SOLOMON: Well, that's what I saw throughout our visit in Baghdad. He was very conscious of the need to be sensitive to the feelings of Americans and, for that matter, people everywhere. He wasn't trying to go in and be a hotshot. As he said, point blank, "I'm here to learn, not to teach." And I think he fulfilled that mission.

NACHMAN: The *New York Times* today said that the situation with Jane Fonda a generation ago in North Vietnam was very much on his mind. Can you talk about that?

SOLOMON: Mr. Penn showed a lot more maturity and I think complexity of thought than what Ms. Fonda displayed back during the Vietnam War, when she went to North Vietnam.

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SEAN PENN (videotape): There is no question in my mind that this conflict can be resolved peacefully. I think it's going to take an enormous amount of work from both—the entire global community, but from both the United States and from Iraq.

NACHMAN: He went so far as to say, again, according to the *New York Times*, that “I don't imagine I will be apologizing as she did at some far point in the future.”

SOLOMON: Yeah, I think that's a key point, because he wasn't zigzagging, he wasn't trying to showboat. He was showing a lot of attention to nuance, frankly, that often goes by politicians and, with due respect, personnel at major networks.

NACHMAN: Was he given any sort of star treatment? People at his level live in very rarefied [unintelligible]. They travel with entourages, they get suites, they get whatever they want in the M&M bowl. Was he there more or less as just a guy?

SOLOMON: Well, you know he was on a ten-hour flight with me from San Francisco to Amsterdam on the way over to Baghdad, and we flew coach. He was in a hotel in Baghdad that was the same room journalists and myself were in, hardly very plush. And in contrast to people in the United States, people in Iraq, for the most part, did not recognize him, but some people did. So no, he wasn't pampered at all.

NACHMAN: He described our position—or the government's position as—and I'm quoting now, “a simplistic and inflammatory view of good and evil.” What is simplistic about portraying Saddam Hussein and his regime as evil? Is there anything subtle or nuanced there?

SOLOMON: Well, actually you have conflated two things. I mean, he was talking about the entirety of U.S. foreign policy. In his ad that he took out in the *Washington Post*, an open letter to President Bush in October of this year, Sean Penn explicitly referred to Saddam Hussein as a tyrant, and he is clearly on the record. And anybody with half a brain knows that Saddam Hussein is a vicious tyrant.

The fact is that U.S. policy has continued to support many tyrants around the world who torture their citizens. The

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human rights situation in Egypt, for instance, has deteriorated in the last year, many people being tortured. A country that gets billions of dollars in aid from the United States, for instance. So if we are going to get on our high horse, we may as well look at the downside of U.S. foreign policy in terms of human rights.

NACHMAN: Norman, I want to go back to my original question. And maybe you can flesh it out. Spending that much time on an airplane and a couple of days in hotel rooms, how sensitive was Sean Penn to being mischaracterized or having his patriotism questioned? Again, the Jane Fonda issue. What did he say?

SOLOMON: Oh, he knew it. He knew what he was walking into. He knew that the Fox news channels of the world were going to be bashing him from day one as soon as he set foot in Baghdad. And it was a risk that he understood was inherent in the situation. But he was far more concerned about the prospect of living in a country that was responsible for a lot of deaths in Iraq that could be avoided.

And we went, I have to tell you, to a number of schools, escorted by UNICEF officials. We met with the director of UNICEF in Baghdad, and we saw hundreds and hundreds of children and interacted with them. And you know it's one thing to say, well that's the price you've got to pay for war. I wish more Americans would go and look into the faces of young children and then talk about whether they want to launch a war on those kids.

NACHMAN: I think both you and Sean would probably have more credibility if we heard a word or two about the atrocities attributed to Saddam against his own people, including children, including gassing and chemical weapons.

SOLOMON: Jerry, are you having a little earwax in your ears? I mean, I just quoted from Sean Penn's open letter to President Bush published in October of this year in the *Washington Post*, where he explicitly referred to Saddam Hussein as a vicious tyrant. So, you know, maybe that was on your list of questions and you forgot to scratch it off.

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NACHMAN: Well, no, but it was a kiss-off, I think, without getting contentious. It's one thing to talk about it, but it's another thing not to give something like equal weight to both sides. It's exactly what you accuse the media . . .

SOLOMON: Well, that's your projection and your formulation of equal whatever to both sides. I don't know where that came from.

NACHMAN: Norman, if we put this conversation on a scale and measured the words you've used critical of U.S. policy versus Saddam policy, there would be a real disequilibrium. I'm trying to hear something representing balance.

SOLOMON: Jerry, you know, I think your question is a bit of a cop-out. I'm a citizen of the United States of America. It's my tax dollars that I pay that are going to result in the actions that are taken by the Pentagon.

I am supposed to be living in a democracy. When I speak up or you speak up or Sean Penn speaks up, we're exercising our First Amendment rights . . .

NACHMAN: Norm, I'm the wrong guy to give a lecture on the First Amendment. I know it very well. I'm not saying you don't have a right to say what you want to say. I'm saying that the credibility gets affected by the skew in terms of the length and types of comments critical of U.S. policy versus kind of the bromides about what Saddam has done to his own people, which is virtually unprecedented in the modern world.

SOLOMON: Well, let me ask you a question in response to that. Do you think that I as an American citizen could have more effect on the policies of my own government, the U.S. government, or the policies of Saddam Hussein? I think that question answers itself.

NACHMAN: Well, I don't have a problem answering your question. And my answer would be, I think you would have stronger credentials as a critic if your comments seemed somewhat more balanced and disinterested, as the lawyers say.

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SOLOMON: Well, you know, here's a situation where it's supposed to be our government of the United States of America. And if every time an American makes a criticism of the president or the Congress, you're going to say, well, gee, you have to spend an equal amount of time denouncing North Korea or Libya or Saddam Hussein or whatever, I mean, it might clog up discourse a bit. We're supposed to have some effect over the policies of our own government and we need to engage in democratic discourse to that end.

NACHMAN: All right. Norm, I got to go because the satellite bill is getting prohibitive. Thank you very much for being with us. And thank you for answering all my questions in a forthcoming manner.

SOLOMON: Thank you, Jerry.

NACHMAN: Well, interviewing is becoming an intellectual taffy pull today, but that's the nature of the business.

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Two days later, I was back in San Francisco, and the U.S. media firestorm was looking fierce. When I went on MSNBC's *The Abrams Report*, the host (destined to become the network's general manager) started off the show by announcing, "After his controversial visit to Baghdad, actor Sean Penn has become a weapon in Iraq's propaganda war"—while the White House was "set to declare Saddam Hussein guilty, saying his latest declaration is filled with lies and omissions about weapons of mass destruction."

Dan Abrams introduced me after telling viewers that Sean Penn had aligned himself with the Iraqi government: "Just showing up in Iraq implies, I think, that he is on their side," Abrams said. "And by focusing on the U.S. role in this conflict, Penn seems to be forgetting that it is the U.N. that is confronting Saddam." The first question was: "Can anyone be surprised, Sean Penn, you, that Iraq is now twisting Sean Penn's words to make it seem like he is basically supporting Iraq's position?"

"Well, Dan," I responded, "from the jump-start, you just said that Sean Penn going to Iraq implies his support for the Iraqi posi-



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tion. I'm actually quite surprised at someone with your level of expertise saying something so ludicrous. Our institute and I myself accompanied Congressman Nick Rahall, a twenty-six-year veteran in the United States Congress, to Iraq in September, much of the same itinerary as Sean Penn's. Are you also saying that his visit to Baghdad implied his support for Saddam Hussein?"

"It is a different time," Abrams replied. I tried to cut in, but he continued: "You asked me a question. Let me answer it. You said, do I think it's the same? And the answer is no. It is a different time now. There is no question, I think, that, at this point, even months later, as the rhetoric is heating up, as the U.N. demands, as the U.N. timeline is now moving forward, it is very different for someone to go to Iraq now than even four months ago."

"Well, September or November or December, it is still the same basic situation of an American going there. I would point out to you and the viewers that, in October of this year, Sean Penn took out a full-page ad in the *Washington Post*, an open letter to President Bush. Let me read you one sentence from that letter: 'There can be no acceptance of the criminal viciousness of the tyrant Saddam Hussein'—unquote. I think that makes his position rather clear about the Iraqi government."

"But, see, the problem is, you can read me a line from a letter, but the bottom line is, Sean Penn being there means something," the MSNBC host retorted. "It has an impact. And the bottom line is, now he is being used as a tool in the propaganda war."

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That winter, movers and shakers in Washington shuffled along to the beat of a media drum that kept reporting on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as a virtual certainty. At the same time, millions of Americans tried to prevent an invasion; their activism ranged from letters and petitions to picket lines, civil disobedience, marches, and mass rallies. On January 18, 2003, as the *Washington Post* recalled years later, "an antiwar protest described as the largest since the Vietnam War drew several hundred thousand . . . on the eve of the

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Iraq war, in subfreezing Washington weather. The high temperature reported that day was in the mid-20s."

The outcry was global, and the numbers grew larger. On February 15 an estimated 10 million people demonstrated against the impending war. A dispatch from Knight-Ridder news service summed up the events of that day: "By the millions, peace marchers in cities around the world united Saturday behind a single demand: No war with Iraq." But the war planners running the U.S. government were determined.

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*March 9, 2003:*

This time I'm debating someone from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a group headed by a former official of the Republican National Committee. The CNN anchor on duty, Anderson Cooper, introduces the segment: "A war of words has erupted over documents the U.S. used to help make its case against Iraq. It concerned some papers Secretary of State Colin Powell showed to the U.N. Security Council when he laid out evidence against Baghdad last month. Well, Friday, chief nuclear inspector Mohamed ElBaradei said he thinks some of those documents were fake, and today he explained why."

The brouhaha is "much ado about nothing," says the Foundation's spokesman, David Silverstein. He adds: "The fact remains that no matter what kind of bad intelligence might have been fed to the United Nations from U.S. or British or other sources, there is no erasing the fact that Saddam has violated U.N. resolutions for twelve years, that he's used poison gas on his own people, that he continues to murder them at will. There is no getting around that. There is no getting around the fact that he's a threat both to U.S. interests in the region and to our allies there. And so whether or not this turns out to be a forgery is almost immaterial. The time has come for Saddam to be removed."

When my turn comes, I say: "It's clear that it is a forgery and it's very important. The reason that the *New York Times* today editori-

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alized that the statements on Friday at the U.N. Security Council were devastating from Blix and ElBaradei is that this is part of a pattern. Forged documents claiming that the Iraqis were seeking uranium to enrich for their weapons program turn out to be absolute falsehoods. The much-ballyhooed claim for aluminum tubes for a nuclear program, again, falsehood. A poison factory we heard so much about from Secretary Powell again doesn't hold up when reporters go there."

The discussion plunges downhill soon after Cooper says: "Norman seems to be indicating that he at least believes the U.S. administration knew that these documents perhaps were not accurate. Do you think that is at all a possibility?"

"Well," Silverstein replies, "I'm sure Norman subscribes to the notion that there is this vast right-wing conspiracy out there that controls the minds of people and that we should all be walking around with tin foil on our heads to prevent it. . . ."

Silverstein is one of those TV debaters who has mastered the strategy of constant interruption. For the rest of the segment, it's a battle to complete even a single thought.

SOLOMON: We have a slow motion Gulf of Tonkin incident here where document after document has been proven to be forgery.

SILVERSTEIN: Is that the best you can do, Norman? Come on.

SOLOMON: Gulf of Tonkin incident here—

*(crosstalk)*

SOLOMON: If you'll stop interrupting me, sir.

SILVERSTEIN: —you can do better.

SOLOMON: This war is telegraphed ahead of time to be based on lies, and we know it now. We have to stop this war—

SILVERSTEIN: He murdered Iraqis, he murdered millions of Iraqis.

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