

The Best

OF COLDTYPE COLUMNISTS

2003

**GEORGE MONBIOT MICHAEL I. NIMAN
JOHN PILGER AND NORMAN SOLOMON**

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Edited & designed by Tony Sutton

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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ColdType columnists: left to right, from top) George Monbiot, Michael I. Niman, John Pilger and Norman Solomon

THE AUTHORS

Each month, *ColdType* reprints commentary and opinion from four of the world's top columnists: George Monbiot (**London Calling**) of the London *Guardian*; Michael I. Niman (**Getting A Grip**), professor of Journalism and Media Studies in the Communication Department at Buffalo State College; John Pilger (**Words Against War**), who writes for many newspapers and magazine including Britain's *New Statesman*, *Daily Mirror* and *Independent*; and Norman Solomon (**Media Beat**), executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, whose columns appear in newspapers across North America.

This e-book contains one column from each month of 2003 from each of these writers (10 from Niman), selected by *ColdType* editor Tony Sutton. N.B. English and American spellings reflect the origin of the articles.

You can read these columnists and much more at

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January

GEORGE MONBIOT / JANUARY 9

The time for talking is over

THE REST OF EUROPE MUST BE WONDERING whether Britain has gone into hibernation. At the end of this month our Prime Minister is likely to announce the decision he made months ago, that Britain will follow the US into Iraq. If so, then two or three weeks later, the war will begin. Unless the UN inspectors find something before January 27, this will be a war without even the flimsiest of pretexts: an unprovoked attack whose purpose is to enhance the wealth and power of an American kleptocracy. Far from promoting peace, it could be the first in a series of imperial wars. The gravest global crisis since the end of the Cold War is three weeks away, and most of us seem to be asking why someone else doesn't do something about it.

It is not often that the people of these islands have an opportunity to change the course of world events. Bush knows that the Americans' approval of his war depends, in part, upon its credibility overseas: opinion polls have shown that many of those who would support an international attack would withdraw that support if they perceived that the US was acting alone. An international attack, in this case, means an attack supported by Britain. If Blair pulled out, Bush could be forced to think again. Blair will pull out only if he perceives that the political cost of sticking with Bush is greater than the cost of deserting him. Bush's war, in other words, depends upon our indifference. As Gramsci remarked, "what comes to pass does so not so much because a few people want it to happen, as because the mass of citizens abdicate their responsibility and let things be".

There are several reasons why most British people do not seem prepared to act. New military technology has removed the need for a

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draft, so the otherwise unengaged young men who might have become the core of the resistance movement are left to blast imaginary enemies on their Gameboys. The economy is still growing, so underlying resentment towards the government is muted; yet we perceive our jobs and prospects to be insecure, so we are reluctant to expose ourselves to trouble.

It also seems that many people who might have contested this war simply can't believe it's happening. If, paradoxically, we were facing a real threat from a real enemy, the debate would have seemed more urgent. But if Blair had told us that we had to go to war to stop Saruman of Isengard from sending his orcs against the good people of Rohan, it would scarcely seem less plausible than the threat of Saddam of Iraq dropping bombs on America.

These factors may explain our feebleness. They don't excuse it. It is true that our chances of stopping this war are slight: both men appear determined to proceed, with or without evidence or cause. But to imagine that protest is useless if it doesn't lead to an immediate cessation is to misunderstand its purpose and power. Even if we cannot stop the attack upon Iraq, we must ensure that it becomes so politically costly that there will never be another like it. And this means that the usual demos will no longer suffice.

There have, so far, been many well-organised and determined protests, and several more are planned over the next six weeks. On January 18, demonstrators will seek to blockade the armed forces' joint headquarters at Northwood, in North London. Three days later, there'll be a mass lobby of parliament; at 6pm on the day the war is announced, protesters will gather in almost every town centre in Britain. On February 15, there'll be a massive rally in London. These actions are critically important, as they'll demonstrate the level of public opposition. But they're unlikely, by themselves, to provoke one of Blair's famous sweats. We must raise the temperature.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has already tried one bold and unprecedented measure: seeking to persuade the courts to rule

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that attacking Iraq without a new UN resolution would be illegal. But on December 17th, the judges decided that they do not have the power to interpret the existing resolution. It seems that we now have few options but to launch a massive, though non-violent, campaign of disruption.

CND and the Stop the War Coalition have suggested an hour's stoppage on the day after the war begins. Many activists are now talking about building on this, and seeking to provoke wider strike action, or even a general strike.

This is, of course, difficult and dangerous. Some general strikes have been effective, forcing the tsar to agree to a constitution and a legislative assembly in 1905, for example, reversing the Kapp Putsch in Berlin in 1920, and overthrowing the Khuri regime in Lebanon in 1952. Others have been counter-productive, in some cases disastrous. When the French general strike was broken in 1920, the labour movement all but collapsed. Mussolini used the announcement of a general strike in 1922 to represent himself as the only man capable of restoring order; he seized power, with the king's blessing, after the fascists had routed the strikers and burnt down the Socialist Party headquarters. If we call for a strike and almost everyone goes to work, Blair will see this as a sign that he can do as he pleases.

But this is the scale on which we should be thinking. If we cannot mobilise the workforce, there are still plenty of means of concentrating politicians' minds. We could, for example, consider blocking the roads down which Blair and his key ministers must travel to meet their appointments, disrupting the speeches they make and blockading the most important public buildings. Hundreds of us are likely to be arrested, but that, as the Vietnam protesters found, serves only to generate public interest. Non-violence, however, is critical: nothing did more harm to the anti-war movement in the late 1960s than the Days of Rage organised in Chicago by the Weathermen.

But peaceful, well-focused and widespread nuisance, even if it irritates other members of the public, forces the issue to the front of peo-

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ple's minds, and ensures that no one can contemplate the war without also contemplating the opposition to the war. We must oblige people to recognise that something unprecedented in recent times is taking place, that Bush, assisted by Blair's moral slipstreaming, is seeking to summon a war from a largely peaceful world. We will fail unless we stage a political drama commensurate with the scale of the threat.

All this will, of course, be costly. But there comes a point at which political commitment is meaningless unless you are prepared to act on it. According to the latest opinion poll, some 42% of British people – against the 38% who support it – want to stop this war. But if our action is confined to shaking our heads at the television set, Blair might as well have a universal mandate. Are you out there? Or are you waiting for someone else to act on your behalf?

MICHAEL I. NIMAN / JANUARY 9

What Bush would rather you didn't know

When Iraq presented its weapons declaration to the United Nations last month, the Bush administration immediately attacked the report as being incomplete, hinting that producing a partial report might be a justification to unleash upon that nation the most lethal killing machine history has known.

The Bush folks were indeed telling the truth. The report distributed by the United Nations was missing key pieces of information about Iraq's weapons programs. That's because the United States removed over 8,000 pages of information from the 11,800 page report, before passing it on.

The missing pages incriminated 24 U.S. based corporations and the successive Reagan and Bush-Daddy administrations in connection with illegally supplying Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government with myriad weapons of mass destruction and the training to use them.

According to the report, Eastman Kodak (which seems not to have fundamentally changed since collaborating with the Nazis in WWII), Dupont, Honeywell, Rockwell, Sperry, Hewlett-Packard and Bechtel were among the American companies aiding the Iraqi weapons program leading up to the invasion of Kuwait.

The report also reiterated information previously documented by Senator Byrd, and before that, reported in a host of Alternative newspapers and magazines and radio shows around the world, detailing how the U.S. Government directly supplied weapons of mass destruction to Saddam Hussein – weapons he then used against his own people while the U.S. resupplied his arsenal.

In addition to biological and chemical weapons components such as Anthrax, various U.S. government agencies, such as the Department of Energy, Department of Commerce, Department of Agriculture and the Livermore, Los Alamos and Sandia nuclear weapons labs, also supplied Saddam's government with material for its nuclear weapons program and training in how to use that material.

Then of course there's Dick Cheney's Haliburton outfit, which got the contract to rebuild Saddam's oilfields after the 1991 Gulf War. This is a new twist on the old bored child's game of building up and knocking down blocks, but only with a fat government subsidy and tens of thousands of dead bodies. But that's another story

None of this comes as any surprise to people who have been following the Iraq situation for the past two decades. In fact, it was American peace activists, and not the gung-ho pro-war flag sticker-on-the-SUV chicken-hawks, who first raised the warning about Iraq's U.S. supported weapons program. In short, the cat's been out of the bag for quite a while on this story – hence outright denial of the Iraqi report's allegations was not a feasible option for the Bushistas. Yet, with the Iraqi report strengthening calls for war-crimes indictments against key Reagan/Bush-Daddy administration officials such as former and current Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, for collaboration with Saddam on the massacres of Iraqi Kurds, young Bush felt compelled to do something about the embarrassing report.

Hence, with all the finesse of a frat boy tossing a coke spoon from a speeding Land Rover with troopers in hot pursuit, Bush simply ordered 8,000 incriminating pages of the Iraqi report snipped and trashed. Who'd know?

This is one of the more frightening aspects of this Bush-league White House: their sheer gall and arrogance. It's what lead Trent Lott to say to the 'out-group' what's he's on record saying to the 'in-group' for years. They're all high on their own power, believing they can get away with anything. By comparison, Richard Nixon comes off like a jaywalker.

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The mechanics of this theft were simple. Iraq presented one copy on CD-ROM to the International Atomic Energy Agency, where it was classified “secret,” and another to the U.N. Security Council, all of whose permanent members, (Britain, France, China and Russia) whom shared the Bush administration’s desire to suppress the report since they were also implicated for their roles in arming Iraq. Russia and China, in fact, are still arming Iraq (remember that next time you see some yahoo in the Wal Mart parking lot loading his flag draped gas guzzler with Chinese sweatshop booty).

The Council is currently chaired by a temporary member, Columbia, whose brutally repressive government is propped up by the presence of the U.S. military, currently fighting a “low-intensity” war in that country. Hence, it didn’t take much pressure for the Columbians to look the other way as the U.S. reps snipped two thirds of the report. The other members of the Security Council all received the doctored document.

The Bush plan fell through, however, since the Iraqi’s were not about to stand by and be chastised and threatened for not completing a report that they actually completed. The original report was filed as a CD. Now, with CDs costing about a dime, the cost of producing and leaking a few extra copies was clearly within reach for a country whose madman dictator has gold plated toilet seats in his half-dozen palaces.

Nobody can say for sure how many dimes Iraq spent before one of the CDs finally landed in the hand of Andreas Zumach, a journalist with the Berlin newspaper, Die Tageszeitung, who broke the story about the missing pages on December 19th. By December 20th, people around the world were once again reading about how the U.S. armed Iraq, and now, how the U.S. brazenly tried to engineer world opinion by altering Iraq’s own document and floating bogus claims of noncompliance with U.N. reporting requirements. Globally, Bush’s cheap ploy yielded a full-tilt backfire, with American credibility flushed down the drain.

Back in the U.S. , however, it’s another story. Media-wise, we might

as well live on a different planet than our global neighbors. With the exception of the alternative media, most notably Amy Goodman's Democracy Now radio show (which broke the story here on December 19th with an interview of Andreas Zumach), the U.S. corporate media censored this piece of headline-grabbing news. Hence, we're still in "Axis of Evil" mode, ready to kick some Iraqi ass – though truth be told, any real battle against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction would have to begin in Washington. Yet, no mass media outlet in the U.S. will dare cover this story or explore what the term "regime change" really should come to mean.

The situation is particularly angering here in Buffalo. On Sunday, January 05, The News' editor, Margaret Sullivan, in an embarrassing display of self-praise, wrote that unlike politically partisan newspapers of days gone by, "mainstream newspapers these days set out to be objective in their news coverage." Hence, she ads, "Reporters are expected to get both sides of every situation and to keep their opinions out of their news stories." To date, however, her paper has still not reported any side of this story – an especially negligent omission considering that our nation is marching off to war based on partial information and misinformation. Sullivan has the rhetoric down all right, but given her paper's shameful biased reporting in favor of pet politicians and developers, coupled with its habitual failure to report stories embarrassing to the Bush junta, she clearly doesn't seem to be serious about tacking the challenges of journalism.

Don Boswell's Western New York Public Broadcasting Association is another gatekeeper standing between Buffalonians and international news. While millions of other Americans had the opportunity to learn of the doctored report by listening to Amy Goodman's December 19th Democracy Now radio show, Western New Yorkers were not among them due to WNYPBA president Boswell's refusal to carry the program on either of his organization's two radio stations. The reason why is no mystery. When Boswell was Vice President of Dallas' PBS affiliate, he was quoted by The Corporate Philanthropy Report (April 1991),

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explaining how such decisions are made. According to Boswell, “We now work more closely with the creative department at the station to try to keep them from producing unfundable projects.”

Given WNYPBA’s close relationship to the corporate community, it’s no wonder they shun the “unfundable” but hard hitting Democracy Now. This is especially frustrating since Western New Yorkers indeed pledged thousands of dollars to WNYPBA during their last fundraising drive, on the condition they broadcast Democracy Now. It’s this public commitment that has brought the show to other cities. WNYPBA, however, seems more interested in placating the corporate community, and collecting the more lucrative corporate underwriting, then on bringing serious news programming to its “all-news” station.

So for now, the gall and arrogance of the Bush administration is paying off. With gatekeepers like Sullivan and Boswell on their side, they can and are getting away with paving the road to war with lies and misinformation. And as long as nobody in the corporate media stands tall and takes them to task, our country will be hijacked into war.

NORMAN SOLOMON / JANUARY 24

Memo to Washington: When war is a rush

To: Washington's most powerful people

K, let's review the main points. A basic PR problem remains. While you're in a hurry to launch an all-out war on Iraq, the main obstacle is that a large majority of Americans don't feel the rush. Uncle Sam's usual carrots and sticks have a long way to go at the U.N. Security Council. The big disappointment of January is that some key allies haven't caved yet.

No need to belabor the recent polling numbers. Newsweek did a national sampling of opinion midway through the month, and you went into a funk when you read the Associated Press summary: "Most Americans want the United States to take more time seeking a peaceful solution in Iraq rather than moving quickly into a military confrontation."

The next sentence was even more cautionary: "By 60 percent to 35 percent, people in the Newsweek poll ... said they would prefer that the Bush administration allow more time to find an alternative to war." And, what's more, "a majority would be opposed should this country act without the support of the United Nations and had no more than one or two allies."

But before you panic at the specter of peace breaking out, take a long cold look at another finding: "Support for a military option would be strong, 81 percent, if the United States were to act with full allied support and the backing of the U.N. Security Council." Such full support and backing is likely to be unnecessary. At home, appreciable war fever is available for inflammation below the surface, and an initial

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large majority of domestic public opinion will not be needed to get the war job done.

It may be possible to chip away at recalcitrant citizens by portraying the obstinate allies as mischievous or worse. Some media coverage has been apt. A quiet cheer is in order for your friends at The Washington Post, where strong editorial support for a righteous war often runs parallel with news articles. When the Post recently reported on its front page that France signaled plans to “wage a major diplomatic fight, including possible use of its veto power” on the Security Council, the newspaper informed readers that France and other balking countries had just engaged in “a diplomatic version of an ambush.”

An undertone of allied flirtation with treachery is a helpful media spin at a critical moment. It provides a wisp of underdog status for American diplomats as they salvage what support they can and preen themselves as courageous global visionaries — a posture that can augur well for the aftermath to a State of the Union text swaddling the president’s war cries in oodles of lofty rhetoric.

The cabinet and sub-cabinet heavy hitters naturally pile on with a renewed blitz of network talk shows. One way or another, they explain that the USA’s war train is leaving the station, and other nations would do well to hop on board.

Not many pundits emphasize that the war dealers in Washington have, as an ace in the hole, the ability to begin large-scale bloodshed and then let the devil take the hindmost. When warfare becomes a fait accompli — with high-tech missiles suddenly flying and with American soldiers killing and even dying — the public’s numbers quickly shift away from antiwar sentiment (at least for a while). It’s not necessary to consolidate a supportive majority before war gets rolling. It’s sufficient to have enough people cowed and numbed so that opposition to starting the war stays within tolerable bounds.

As thoroughly modern masters of war, you comprehend the captivating power of television to simultaneously mesmerize and anesthetize. Once the Pentagon’s carefully screened video clips are stream-

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ing onto TV sets in wartime, a kind of intoxication sets in; the journalists seem to feel the rush, and they pass it along. The media pace is frenetic, with adrenaline pumping; the new conditions of carnage are exactly suitable to play to the U.S. government's unrivaled strength – its capacity to inflict massive and overpowering violence. And, helped along by media spin, most people back home can be induced to revere the inevitable winner.

“A conqueror is always a lover of peace,” the Prussian general Karl von Clausewitz remarked two centuries ago. The more you yearn to launch a war, the more you must strive to burnish your image as someone who craves peace.

On your terms, of course.

JOHN PILGER / JANUARY 29

Bloody cowards

William Russell, the great correspondent who reported the carnage of imperial wars, may have first used the expression, “blood on his hands”, to describe impeccable politicians who, at a safe distance, order the mass killing of ordinary people.

In my experience, “on his hands” applies especially to those modern political leaders who have had no personal experience of war, like George W Bush, who managed not to serve in Vietnam, and the effete Tony Blair. There is about them the essential cowardice of the man who causes death and suffering not by his own hand, but through a chain of command that affirms his “authority”.

In 1946, the judges at Nuremberg, who tried the Nazi leaders for war crimes, left no doubt about what they regarded as the gravest crimes against humanity. The most serious was an unprovoked invasion of a sovereign state that offered no threat to one’s homeland. Then there was the murder of civilians, for which responsibility rested with the “highest authority”.

Blair is about to commit both these crimes, for which he is being denied even the flimsiest United Nations cover, now that the weapons inspectors have found, as one of them put it, “zilch”. Like those in the dock at Nuremberg, he has no democratic cover. Using the archaic “royal prerogative”, he did not consult parliament or the British people when he dispatched 35,000 troops and ships and aircraft to the Gulf; he consulted a foreign power, the Washington regime.

Unelected in 2000, the Washington regime of George W Bush is now totalitarian, captured by a clique whose fanaticism and ambitions of “endless war” and “full spectrum dominance” are a matter of record. All the world knows their names: Bush, Rumsfeld, Rice, Wolfowitz,

Cheney and Perle; and Powell, the false liberal. Bush's State of the Union speech last night was reminiscent of that other great moment, in 1938, when Hitler called his generals together and told them, "I must have war". He then had it.

To call Blair a mere "poodle" is to allow him distance from the killing of innocent Iraqi men, women and children for which he will share responsibility. He is the embodiment of the most dangerous appeasement humanity has known since the 1930s. The current American elite is the Third Reich of our times, although this distinction ought not to let us forget that they have merely accelerated more than half a century of unrelenting American state terrorism: from the atomic bombs dropped cynically on Japan as a signal of their new power, to the dozens of countries invaded, directly or by proxy, in order to destroy democracy wherever it collided with American "interests", such as a voracious appetite for the world's natural resources, like oil.

When you next hear Blair or Straw or Bush talk about "bringing democracy to the people of Iraq", remember that it was the CIA that installed the Ba'ath Party in Baghdad from which emerged Saddam Hussein. "That was my favourite coup," said the CIA man responsible. When you next hear Blair and Bush talking about a "smoking gun" in Iraq, ask why the US government last December confiscated the 12,000 pages of Iraq's weapons declaration, saying they contained "sensitive information" which needed "a little editing".

Sensitive indeed. The original Iraqi documents listed 150 American, British and other foreign companies that supplied Iraq with its nuclear, chemical and missile technology, many of them in illegal transactions. In 2000, Peter Hain, then a Foreign Office minister, blocked a parliamentary request to publish the full list of law-breaking British companies. He has never explained why.

As a reporter of many wars, I am constantly aware that words on the page like these can seem almost abstract, part of a great chess game unconnected to people's lives. The most vivid images I carry make that connection. They are the end result of orders given faraway by the likes

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of Bush and Blair, who never see, or would have the courage to see, the effect of their actions on ordinary lives: the blood on their hands.

Let me give a couple of examples. Waves of B-52 bombers will be used in the attack on Iraq. In Vietnam, where more than a million people were killed in the American invasion of the 1960s, I once watched three ladders of bombs curve in the sky, falling from B-52s flying in formation, unseen above the clouds.

They dropped about seventy tons of explosives that day in what was known as the “long box” pattern, the military term for carpet bombing. Everything inside a “box” was presumed destroyed.

When I reached a village within the “box”, the street had been replaced by a crater. I slipped on the severed shank of a buffalo, and fell hard into a ditch filled with pieces of limbs and the intact bodies of children thrown into the air by the blast. The children’s skin had folded back, like parchment, revealing veins and burnt flesh that seeped blood, while the eyes, intact, stared straight ahead. A small leg had been so contorted by the blast that the foot seemed to be growing from a shoulder. I vomited.

I am being purposely graphic. This is what I saw, and often; yet even in that “media war”, I never saw images of these grotesque sights on television, or in the pages of a newspaper. I saw them only pinned on the wall of news agency offices in Saigon as a kind of freaks’ gallery.

Returning to Vietnam, I often came upon terribly deformed children in villages where American aircraft had sprayed a herbicide called Agent Orange, in what was known as “Operation Ranch Hand”. Agent Orange was banned in the United States, not surprisingly, for it contained Dioxin, the deadliest known poison. This terrible chemical weapon, which the cliché-mongers would now call a weapon of mass destruction, was dumped on almost half of South Vietnam.

Today, as the poison continues to move through water and soil and food, children continue to be born without palates, and chins, and scrotums, or are stillborn. Many have leukemia. You never saw these children on the TV news then; they were too hideous for their pictures,

the evidence of a great crime, even to be pinned up on a wall; and they are old news now. That, and the peeled back flesh and the small smashed limbs, are the true face of war. Will you be shown it by satellite when Iraq is attacked? I doubt it.

I was starkly reminded of the children of Vietnam when I travelled in Iraq two years ago. A paediatrician showed me hospital wards of children similarly deformed: a phenomenon unheard of prior to the Gulf war in 1991. She kept a photo album of those who had died, their smiles undimmed on grey little faces. Now and then, she would turn away and wipe her eyes.

More than 300 tons of depleted uranium, another weapon of mass destruction, were fired by American aircraft and tanks, and possibly by the British. Many of the rounds were solid uranium, which, inhaled or ingested, causes cancer. In a country where dust carries everything, swirling through markets and playgrounds, children are especially vulnerable. For twelve years, Iraq has been denied specialist equipment that would allow its engineers to decontaminate its southern battlefields. It has also been denied equipment and drugs that would identify and treat the cancer which, it is estimated, will affect almost half the population in the south.

Last November, Jeremy Corbyn MP asked the junior defence minister Adam Ingram what stocks of weapons containing depleted uranium were held by British forces operating in Iraq. His robotic reply was: "I am withholding details in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information."

Let us be clear about what the Bush/Blair attack will do to our fellow human beings in a country already stricken by an embargo run, like a medieval siege, by America and Britain and aimed largely at the civilian population, who are denied even vaccines for children.

Last week, the Pentagon in Washington announced, matter-of-factly, that it intended to shatter Iraq "physically, emotionally and psychologically" by raining down on its people as many as 800 cruise missiles in two days.

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This will be more than twice the number of missiles launched during the entire 40 days of the 1991 Gulf War. A military strategist called Harlan Ullman told American television: "There will not be a safe place in Baghdad. The sheer size of this has never been seen before, never been contemplated before." The strategy is known as "Shock and Awe" and Harlan Ullman is apparently its proud inventor. He said: "You have this simultaneous effect, rather like the nuclear weapons at Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks but minutes."

What will his "Hiroshima effect" actually do to a population of whom almost half are children under the age of fourteen?

The answer is to be found in a "confidential" United Nations document, based on World Health Organisation estimates, which says that "as many as 500,000 people could require treatment as a result of direct and indirect injuries." A Bush/Blair attack will destroy "a functioning primary health care system" and deny clean water to 39 per cent of the population. There is "likely [to be] an outbreak of diseases in epidemic, if not pandemic proportions."

It is Washington's utter disregard for humanity, I believe, together with Blair's lies that have turned most people in this country against them, including people who have not protested before.

Last weekend, Blair said there was no need for the UN weapons inspectors to find a "smoking gun" for Iraq to be attacked. Compare that with his reassurance, in October 2001, that there would be no "wider war" against Iraq unless there was "absolute evidence" of Iraqi complicity in the September 11. And there has been no evidence.

Blair's deceptions are too numerous to list here. He has lied about the nature and effect of the embargo on Iraq by covering up the fact that Washington, with Britain's support, is withholding more than \$5billion worth of humanitarian supplies approved by the Security Council. He has lied about Iraq buying aluminium tubes which, he told Parliament, were "needed to enrich uranium". The International Atomic Energy Agency has denied this outright.

He has lied about an Iraqi "threat", which he discovered only fol-

lowing September 11 2001 when Bush made Iraq a gratuitous target of his “war on terror”. Blair’s “Iraq dossier” has been mocked by human rights groups. However, what is wonderful is that, across the world, the sheer force of public opinion isolates Bush and Blair and their lemming, John Howard in Australia. So few people believe them and support them that the Guardian newspaper this week went in search of the few who do – “the hawks”. The paper published a list of celebrity warmongers, some apparently shy at describing his or her contortion of intellect and morality. It is a small list.

In contrast, the majority of people in the West, including the United States, are now against this gruesome adventure, and the numbers grow every day. It is time Members of the House of Commons joined their constituents and, in so doing, reclaimed the true authority of parliament. MPs like Tam Dalyell, Alice Mahon, Jeremy Corbyn and George Galloway have stood alone for too long on this issue, and there have been too many sham debates, manipulated by Downing Street. If, as Galloway says, a majority of Labour backbenchers are against an attack, let them speak up now. Blair’s fig leaf of a “coalition” is very important to Bush, and only the moral power of the British people can bring the troops home without them firing a shot.

The consequences of not speaking out go well beyond an attack on Iraq. Washington will effectively take over the Middle East, ensuring an age of terrorism other than their own. The next American attack is likely to be Iran; the Israelis want this, and their aircraft are already in place in Turkey. Then it may be China’s turn. “Endless war” is Vice President Cheney’s contribution to our understanding.

Bush has said he will use nuclear weapons “if necessary”. On March 26 last, Geoffrey Hoon said that other countries “can be absolutely confident that in the right conditions we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons.”

Such madness is the true enemy. What’s more, it is right here at home, and you, the British people, can stop it.

February

MICHAEL I. NIMAN / FEBRUARY 5

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 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.

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

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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 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.

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 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-

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400 Cruise missiles per day at Baghdad didn't escape The Observer, who termed the trade "bizarre."

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 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 govern-

ment and their crazy plan for world domination is moving into gear.

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 inter-

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vention 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 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.

GEORGE MONBIOT / FEBRUARY 17

Too much of a good thing

We are a biological weapon. On Saturday the anti-war movement released some 70,000 tonnes of organic material onto the streets of London, and similar quantities in locations all over the world. This weapon of mass disruption was intended as a major threat to the security of western governments. Our marches were unprecedented, but they have, so far, been unsuccessful. The immune systems of the US and British governments have proved to be rather more robust than we had hoped. Their intransigence leaves the world with a series of unanswered questions.

Why, when the most urgent threat arising from illegal weapons of mass destruction is the nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan, is the US government ignoring it and concentrating on Iraq? Why, if it believes human rights are so important, is it funding the oppression of the Algerians, the Uzbeks, the Palestinians, the Turkish Kurds and the Colombians? Why has the bombing of Iraq, rather than feeding the hungry, providing clean water or preventing disease, become the world's most urgent humanitarian concern? Why has it become so much more pressing than any other that it should command a budget four times the size of America's entire annual spending on overseas aid?

In a series of packed lectures in Oxford, Professor David Harvey, one of the world's most distinguished geographers, has provided what may be the first comprehensive explanation of the US government's determination to go to war. His analysis suggests that it has little to do with Iraq, less to do with weapons of mass destruction and nothing to do with helping the oppressed.

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The underlying problem the US confronts is the one which periodically afflicts all successful economies: the over-accumulation of capital. Excessive production of any good – be it cars or shoes or bananas – means that unless new markets can be found, the price of that product falls and profits collapse. Just as it was in the early 1930s, the US is suffering from surpluses of commodities, manufactured products, manufacturing capacity and money. Just as it was then, it is also faced with a surplus of labour, yet the two surpluses, as before, cannot be profitably matched. This problem has been developing in the US since 1973. It has now tried every available means of solving it and, by doing so, maintaining its global dominance. The only remaining, politically viable option is war.

In the 1930s, the US government addressed the problems of excess capital and labour through the New Deal. Its vast investments in infrastructure, education and social spending mopped up surplus money, created new markets for manufacturing and brought hundreds of thousands back into work. In 1941, it used military spending to the same effect.

After the war, its massive spending in Europe and Japan permitted America to offload surplus cash, while building new markets. During the same period, it spent lavishly on infrastructure at home and on the development of the economies of the southern and south-eastern states. This strategy worked well until the early 1970s. Then three inexorable processes began to mature. As the German and Japanese economies developed, the US was no longer able to dominate production. As they grew, these new economies also stopped absorbing surplus capital and started to export it. At the same time, the investments of previous decades began to pay off, producing new surpluses. The crisis of 1973 began with a worldwide collapse of property markets, which were, in effect, regurgitating the excess money they could no longer digest.

The US urgently required a new approach, and it deployed two blunt solutions. The first was to switch from the domination of global

production to the domination of global finance. The US Treasury, working with the International Monetary Fund, began to engineer new opportunities in developing countries for America's commercial banks.

The IMF started to insist that countries receiving its help should liberalise their capital markets. This permitted the speculators on Wall Street to enter and, in many cases, raid their economies. The financial crises the speculators caused forced the devaluation of those countries' assets. This had two beneficial impacts for the US economy. Through the collapse of banks and manufacturers in Latin America and East Asia, surplus capital was destroyed. The bankrupted companies in those countries could then be bought by US corporations at rock-bottom prices, creating new space into which American capital could expand.

The second solution was what Harvey calls "accumulation through dispossession", which is really a polite term for daylight robbery. Land was snatched from peasant farmers, public assets were taken from citizens through privatisation, intellectual property was seized from everyone through the patenting of information, human genes, and animal and plant varieties. These are the processes which, alongside the depredations of the IMF and the commercial banks, brought the global justice movement into being. In all cases, new territories were created into which capital could expand and in which its surpluses could be absorbed.

Both these solutions are now failing. As the east Asian countries whose economies were destroyed by the IMF five years ago have recovered, they have begun, once more, to generate vast capital surpluses of their own. America's switch from production to finance as a means of global domination, and the government's resulting economic mismanagement, has made it more susceptible to disruption and economic collapse. Corporations are now encountering massive public resistance as they seek to expand their opportunities through dispossession. The only peaceful solution is a new New Deal, but that option is blocked by the political class in the US: the only new spending it will

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permit is military spending. So all that remains is war and imperial control.

Attacking Iraq offers the US three additional means of offloading capital while maintaining its global dominance. The first is the creation of new geographical space for economic expansion. The second (though this is not a point Harvey makes) is military spending (a process some people call “military Keynesianism”). The third is the ability to control the economies of other nations by controlling the supply of oil. This, as global oil reserves diminish, will become an ever more powerful lever. Happily, just as legitimation is required, scores of former democrats in both the US and Britain have suddenly decided that empire isn’t such a dirty word after all, and that the barbarian hordes of other nations really could do with some civilisation at the hands of a benign superpower.

Strategic thinkers in the US have been planning this next stage of expansion for years. Paul Wolfowitz, now deputy secretary for defence, was writing about the need to invade Iraq in the mid-1990s. The impending war will not be fought over terrorism, anthrax, VX gas, Saddam Hussein, democracy or the treatment of the Iraqi people. It is, like almost all such enterprises, about the control of territory, resources and other nations’ economies. Those who are planning it have recognised that their future dominance can be sustained by means of a simple economic formula: blood is a renewable resource; oil is not.

NORMAN SOLOMON / FEBRUARY 27

Follow-up needed after Iraqi weapons story

You gotta hand it to America's mass media: When war hangs in the balance, they sure know how to bury a story. After devoting thousands of network hours and oceans of ink to stories about "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, major U.S. news outlets did little but yawn in the days after the latest Newsweek published an exclusive report on the subject – a piece headlined "The Defector's Secrets."

It's hard to imagine how any journalist on the war beat could read the article's lead without doing a double take: "Hussein Kamel, the highest-ranking Iraqi official ever to defect from Saddam Hussein's inner circle, told CIA and British intelligence officers and U.N. inspectors in the summer of 1995 that after the Gulf War, Iraq destroyed all its chemical and biological weapons stocks and the missiles to deliver them."

The article was written by Newsweek national security correspondent John Barry, who has been with the magazine since 1985. After following the Iraq weapons story for a dozen years, he draws on in-depth knowledge – in stark contrast to the stenographic approach taken by most journalists on the beat, who seem content to relay the pronouncements coming out of Washington and the United Nations.

"I think the whole issue of Iraq's weaponry has become steadily more impacted and complicated over the years," Barry told me in a February 26 interview. People often have trouble making sense out of the "twists and turns of the arguments." And, Barry added, what's reported as "fact" provided by the U.S. government or the U.N. is in many cases mere "supposition."

Now, it's time for us to ask some loud questions about the U.S.

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media echo chamber. Such as: Is there anybody awake in there? Barry's potentially explosive story, appearing in the March 3 edition of Newsweek, notes that "Kamel was Saddam Hussein's son-in-law and had direct knowledge of what he claimed: for 10 years he had run Iraq's nuclear, chemical, biological and missile programs."

Making use of written documentation that Newsweek has verified as authentic, the article reports: "Kamel's revelations about the destruction of Iraq's WMD stocks were hushed up by the U.N. inspectors, sources say, for two reasons. Saddam did not know how much Kamel had revealed, and the inspectors hoped to bluff Saddam into disclosing still more. And Iraq has never shown the documentation to support Kamel's story. Still, the defector's tale raises questions about whether the WMD stockpiles attributed to Iraq still exist."

The Newsweek story came off the press on Sunday, February 23. The next day, a would-be authoritative source – the Central Intelligence Agency – explained that it just wasn't so. "It is incorrect, bogus, wrong, untrue," declared CIA spokesman Bill Harlow. For good measure, on the same day, a Reuters article quoted an unnamed "British government source" eager to contradict Newsweek's documented account of what Kamel had said. "We've checked back and he didn't say this," the source contended. "He said just the opposite, that the WMD program was alive and kicking."

Under the unwritten rules of American media coverage, such denials tend to end the matter when the president and Congress have already decided that war is necessary.

It's not as if Kamel ranks as a nobody in media circles. Journalists and U.S. officials are fond of recounting that Saddam Hussein made sure he was quickly killed after the defector returned to Iraq following six months of voluntary exile.

"Until now, Kamel has best been known for exposing Iraq's deceptions about how far its pre-Gulf War biological weapons programs had advanced," media analyst Seth Ackerman points out. He adds that Newsweek's story "is particularly noteworthy because hawks in the

Bush administration have frequently referred to the Kamel episode as evidence that U.N. inspectors are incapable of disarming Iraq on their own.”

Ackerman cites a speech Dick Cheney made last August, when the vice president said that what occurred with Kamel “should serve as a reminder to all that we often learned more as the result of defections than we learned from the inspection regime itself.”

Accounts of Kamel’s debriefing as a defector and his subsequent demise have often served to illustrate the dishonesty and brutality of Iraq’s government. But now that other information has emerged about what he had to say, the fellow seems to be quite a bit less newsworthy.

JOHN PILGER / FEBRUARY 27

Farce, morality and innocent victims

Having failed to fabricate a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda, and prove that Iraq has a secret armoury of banned weapons, the warmongers have fallen back on the “moral case” for an unprovoked attack on a stricken country. Farce has arrived. We want to laugh out loud, a deep and dark and almost grief-laden laugh, at Blair’s concern for the “victims of Saddam Hussein” and his admonishment (reprinted in the Observer) of the millions of protesters: “There will be ... no protests about the thousands of [Iraqi] children that die needlessly every year ...”

First, let’s look back to Saddam’s most famous victim, the British journalist Farzad Bazoft, who was hanged in 1990 for “spying”, a bogus trial following a bogus charge. Those of us who protested at his murder did so in the teeth of a smear campaign by the British government and a press determined to cover for Britain’s favourite tyrant.

The Sun smeared Bazoft by publishing his conviction for stealing when he was a student – information supplied by MI5 on behalf of the Thatcher government, which was then seeking any excuse not to suspend its lucrative business and arms deals with the Iraqi dictator. The Mail and Today suggested that Saddam was right – that Bazoft was a spy. In a memorable editorial, the Sunday Telegraph equated investigative journalism with criminal espionage. Defending Saddam, not his victim, was clearly preferable.

What did Tony Blair say about this outrage? I can find nothing. Did Blair join those of us who protested, on the streets and in print, at the fact that ministers such as Douglas Hurd were commuting to Baghdad, with Hurd going especially to celebrate the anniversary of the coming

to power of the dictator I described as “renowned as the interrogator and torturer of Qasr-al-Nihayyah, the ‘Palace of the End’”?

There is no record of Blair saying anything substantive about Saddam Hussein’s atrocities until after 11 September 2001 when the Americans, having failed to catch Osama Bin Laden, declared Saddam their number one enemy. As for Blair’s assertion that there have been “no protests about the thousands of children that die needlessly under his rule”, the answer is straightforward.

There have been years of protests about the effect of the Anglo-American embargo on the children of Iraq. That the US, backed by Britain, is largely responsible for hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi deaths is the great unspoken in the so-called mainstream of politics and journalism. That the embargo allowed Saddam Hussein to centralise and reinforce his domestic control is equally unmentionable. Whenever the voluminous evidence of such a monumental western crime against humanity is laid out, the crocodile tears of Blair and the rest of the warmongers barely disguise their cynicism.

Denis Halliday, the former assistant secretary general of the United Nations who was the senior UN official in Baghdad, has many times identified the “genocide” of the American-driven sanctions. The UN’s Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) has paid tribute to the Iraqi rationing system, giving it credit for saving an entire population from famine. This, like the evidence and witness of Halliday and his successor, Hans von Sponeck, and the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef) and the Catholic Relief Agency (Cafod) and the 70 members of the US Congress who wrote to President Clinton describing the embargo as “infanticide masquerading as policy”, has been airbrushed out. In contrast, the gassing of the Kurdish town of Halabja in 1988 has become part of Blair’s and Bush’s vocabulary. Eleven months after this atrocity, the assistant US secretary of state James Kelly flew to Baghdad to tell Saddam Hussein: “You are a source for moderation in the region, and the United States wants to broaden her relationship with Iraq.”

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What did Blair say about this? I can find nothing. Read the Murdoch press at the time. There is nothing about Saddam being “another Hitler”; no mention of torture chambers and appeasers. Saddam is one of us, because Washington says so. The Australian, Murdoch’s flagship in the country of his birth, and currently a leading warmonger, thought the most regrettable aspect about Iraq’s use of chemical weapons at Halabja was that it had “given Tehran a propaganda coup and may have destroyed western hopes of quiet diplomacy”. Like other Murdoch papers, it defended Saddam by suggesting that Iraq’s use of chemical and nerve agents was purely defensive.

Of the media warmongers in this country, it is difficult to choose the most absurd. Murdoch’s blustering hagiographer, William (“Mr X”) Shawcross must defer, alas, to David Aaronovitch, the retired Stalinist apologist now employed by the Guardian Group to poke a stick at its readership and whose penchant for getting things wrong makes him the doyen. In his condescending lecture to the millions who marched on 15 February, Aaronovitch wrote:

“I wanted to ask, whether among your hundreds of thousands, the absences bothered you? The Kurds, the Iraqis – of whom there are many thousands in this country – where were they? Why were they not there?”

There were more than 4,000 Kurds marching en bloc. The Kurds foresee clearly yet another sell-out by the west, now that Washington is encouraging the Turkish military to occupy Iraqi Kurdistan. According to my Iraqi friends, there were “a minimum of 3,000 Iraqis” marching. Two years ago, I attended an Iraqi festival at Kensington and Chelsea Town Hall. More than 2,000 Iraqis were present with their families. When Denis Halliday called for an end to the economic siege of Iraq and the implementation of that crucial passage of Security Council Resolution 687, which requires a ban on weapons of mass destruction throughout the region, in Israel as much as Iraq, he received thunderous applause. Everyone there, it seemed to me, had little or no time for Saddam Hussein; but none wanted their country

strangled, attacked and occupied by the west yet again.

Patrick Tyler, a perceptive writer in the New York Times, says that Bush and Blair now face a “tenacious new adversary” – the public. He says we are heading into a new bipolar world with two new superpowers: the regime in Washington on one side, and world public opinion on the other. In a poll of half a million Europeans, Time magazine asked which country was the greatest threat to peace: 5.8 per cent said North Korea, 6.8 per cent said Iraq and 87 per cent said the United States. In other words, the game is up.

People have become aware, above all, that the most dangerous appeasement today has little to do with a regional tyrant, and everything to do with “our” governments.

March

NORMAN SOLOMON / MARCH 6

American media dodges U.N. surveillance story

Three days after a British newspaper revealed a memo about U.S. spying on U.N. Security Council delegations, I asked Daniel Ellsberg to assess the importance of the story. “This leak,” he replied, “is more timely and potentially more important than the Pentagon Papers.” The key word is “timely.” Publication of the secret Pentagon Papers in 1971, made possible by Ellsberg’s heroic decision to leak those documents, came after the Vietnam War had already been underway for many years. But with all-out war on Iraq still in the future, the leak about spying at the United Nations could erode the Bush administration’s already slim chances of getting a war resolution through the Security Council.

“As part of its battle to win votes in favor of war against Iraq,” the London-based Observer reported on March 2, the U.S. government developed an “aggressive surveillance operation, which involves interception of the home and office telephones and the e-mails of U.N. delegates.” The smoking gun was “a memorandum written by a top official at the National Security Agency – the U.S. body which intercepts communications around the world – and circulated to both senior agents in his organization and to a friendly foreign intelligence agency.”

The Observer added: “The leaked memorandum makes clear that the target of the heightened surveillance efforts are the delegations from Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Mexico, Guinea and Pakistan at the U.N. headquarters in New York – the so-called ‘Middle Six’ delegations whose votes are being fought over by the pro-war party, led by the U.S. and Britain, and the party arguing for more time for U.N. inspections, led by France, China and Russia.”

The NSA memo, dated Jan. 31, outlines the wide scope of the sur-

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veillance activities, seeking any information useful to push a war resolution through the Security Council – “the whole gamut of information that could give U.S. policymakers an edge in obtaining results favorable to U.S. goals or to head off surprises.”

Three days after the memo came to light, the Times of London printed an article noting that the Bush administration “finds itself isolated” in its zeal for war on Iraq. “In the most recent setback,” the newspaper reported, “a memorandum by the U.S. National Security Agency, leaked to the Observer, revealed that American spies were ordered to eavesdrop on the conversations of the six undecided countries on the United Nations Security Council.”

The London Times article called it an “embarrassing disclosure.” And the embarrassment was nearly worldwide. From Russia to France to Chile to Japan to Australia, the story was big mainstream news. But not in the United States.

Several days after the “embarrassing disclosure,” not a word about it had appeared in America’s supposed paper of record. The New York Times – the single most influential media outlet in the United States – still had not printed anything about the story. How could that be?

“Well, it’s not that we haven’t been interested,” New York Times deputy foreign editor Alison Smale said on the evening of March 5, nearly 96 hours after the Observer broke the story. “We could get no confirmation or comment” on the memo from U.S. officials.

The Times opted not to relay the Observer’s account, Smale told me. “We would normally expect to do our own intelligence reporting.” She added: “We are still definitely looking into it. It’s not that we’re not.”

Belated coverage would be better than none at all. But readers should be suspicious of the failure of the New York Times to cover this story during the crucial first days after it broke. At some moments in history, when war and peace hang in the balance, journalism delayed is journalism denied.

Overall, the sparse U.S. coverage that did take place seemed eager

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to downplay the significance of the Observer's revelations. On March 4, the Washington Post ran a back-page 514-word article headlined "Spying Report No Shock to U.N.," while the Los Angeles Times published a longer piece that began by emphasizing that U.S. spy activities at the United Nations are "long-standing."

The U.S. media treatment has contrasted sharply with coverage on other continents. "While some have taken a ho-hum attitude in the U.S., many around the world are furious," says Ed Vulliamy, one of the Observer reporters who wrote the March 2 article. "Still, almost all governments are extremely reluctant to speak up against the espionage. This further illustrates their vulnerability to the U.S. government."

To Daniel Ellsberg, the leaking of the NSA memo was a hopeful sign. "Truth-telling like this can stop a war," he said. Time is short for insiders at intelligence agencies "to tell the truth and save many many lives." But major news outlets must stop dodging the information that emerges.

GEORGE MONBIOT / MARCH 25

One rule for us, another for them

Suddenly, the government of the United States has discovered the virtues of international law. It may be waging an illegal war against a sovereign state; it may be seeking to destroy every treaty which impedes its attempts to run the world, but when five of its captured soldiers were paraded in front of the Iraqi television cameras on Sunday, Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary, immediately complained that “it is against the Geneva convention to show photographs of prisoners of war in a manner that is humiliating for them”.

He is, of course, quite right. Article 13 of the third convention, concerning the treatment of prisoners, insists that they “must at all times be protected... against insults and public curiosity”. This may number among the less heinous of the possible infringements of the laws of war, but the conventions, ratified by Iraq in 1956, are non-negotiable. If you break them, you should expect to be prosecuted for war crimes.

This being so, Rumsfeld had better watch his back. For this enthusiastic convert to the cause of legal warfare is, as head of the defence department, responsible for a series of crimes sufficient, were he ever to be tried, to put him away for the rest of his natural life.

His prison camp in Guantanamo Bay, in Cuba, where 641 men (nine of whom are British citizens) are held, breaches no fewer than 15 articles of the third convention. The US government broke the first of these (article 13) as soon as the prisoners arrived, by displaying them, just as the Iraqis have done, on television. In this case, however, they were not encouraged to address the cameras. They were kneeling on the ground, hands tied behind their backs, wearing blacked-out goggles and ear-phones. In breach of article 18, they had been stripped of their own

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clothes and deprived of their possessions. They were then interned in a penitentiary (against article 22), where they were denied proper mess facilities (26), canteens (28), religious premises (34), opportunities for physical exercise (38), access to the text of the convention (41), freedom to write to their families (70 and 71) and parcels of food and books (72).

They were not “released and repatriated without delay after the cessation of active hostilities” (118), because, the US authorities say, their interrogation might, one day, reveal interesting information about al-Qaida. Article 17 rules that captives are obliged to give only their name, rank, number and date of birth. No “coercion may be inflicted on prisoners of war to secure from them information of any kind whatever”. In the hope of breaking them, however, the authorities have confined them to solitary cells and subjected them to what is now known as “torture lite”: sleep deprivation and constant exposure to bright light. Unsurprisingly, several of the prisoners have sought to kill themselves, by smashing their heads against the walls or trying to slash their wrists with plastic cutlery.

The US government claims that these men are not subject to the Geneva conventions, as they are not “prisoners of war”, but “unlawful combatants”. The same claim could be made, with rather more justice, by the Iraqis holding the US soldiers who illegally invaded their country. But this redefinition is itself a breach of article 4 of the third convention, under which people detained as suspected members of a militia (the Taliban) or a volunteer corps (al-Qaida) must be regarded as prisoners of war.

Even if there is doubt about how such people should be classified, article 5 insists that they “shall enjoy the protection of the present convention until such time as their status has been determined by a competent tribunal”. But when, earlier this month, lawyers representing 16 of them demanded a court hearing, the US court of appeals ruled that as Guantanamo Bay is not sovereign US territory, the men have no constitutional rights. Many of these prisoners appear to have been working in Afghanistan as teachers, engineers or aid workers. If the US

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government either tried or released them, its embarrassing lack of evidence would be brought to light.

You would hesitate to describe these prisoners as lucky, unless you knew what had happened to some of the other men captured by the Americans and their allies in Afghanistan. On November 21 2001, around 8,000 Taliban soldiers and Pashtun civilians surrendered at Konduz to the Northern Alliance commander, General Abdul Rashid Dostum. Many of them have never been seen again.

As Jamie Doran's film *Afghan Massacre: Convoy of Death* records, some hundreds, possibly thousands, of them were loaded into container lorries at Qala-i-Zeini, near the town of Mazar-i-Sharif, on November 26 and 27. The doors were sealed and the lorries were left to stand in the sun for several days. At length, they departed for Sheberghan prison, 80 miles away. The prisoners, many of whom were dying of thirst and asphyxiation, started banging on the sides of the trucks. Dostum's men stopped the convoy and machine-gunned the containers. When they arrived at Sheberghan, most of the captives were dead.

The US special forces running the prison watched the bodies being unloaded. They instructed Dostum's men to "get rid of them before satellite pictures can be taken". Doran interviewed a Northern Alliance soldier guarding the prison. "I was a witness when an American soldier broke one prisoner's neck. The Americans did whatever they wanted. We had no power to stop them." Another soldier alleged: "They took the prisoners outside and beat them up, and then returned them to the prison. But sometimes they were never returned, and they disappeared."

Many of the survivors were loaded back in the containers with the corpses, then driven to a place in the desert called Dasht-i-Leili. In the presence of up to 40 US special forces, the living and the dead were dumped into ditches. Anyone who moved was shot. The German newspaper *Die Zeit* investigated the claims and concluded that: "No one doubted that the Americans had taken part. Even at higher levels

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there are no doubts on this issue.” The US group Physicians for Human Rights visited the places identified by Doran’s witnesses and found they “all... contained human remains consistent with their designation as possible grave sites”.

It should not be necessary to point out that hospitality of this kind also contravenes the third Geneva convention, which prohibits “violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture”, as well as extra-judicial execution. Donald Rumsfeld’s department, assisted by a pliant media, has done all it can to suppress Jamie Doran’s film, while General Dostum has begun to assassinate his witnesses.

It is not hard, therefore, to see why the US government fought first to prevent the establishment of the international criminal court, and then to ensure that its own citizens are not subject to its jurisdiction. The five soldiers dragged in front of the cameras yesterday should thank their lucky stars that they are prisoners not of the American forces fighting for civilisation, but of the “barbaric and inhuman” Iraqis.

JOHN PILGER / MARCH 26

Six days of shame

Today is a day of shame for the British military as it declares the Iraqi city of Basra, with a stricken population of a million men, women and children, a “military target”. You will not read or hear those words on the BBC or elsewhere in the establishment media that claims to speak for Britain. But they are true. With Basra, shame is now our signature, forged by Blair and Bush.

Having destroyed Basra’s water and power supplies, and cut off food distribution, and having failed to crack its human defences, they are now preparing to lay siege to Iraq’s second city which, reflecting the nation as a whole, is more than 40 per cent children.

What an ignominious moment in British history. Here is an impoverished third world country under attack by a superpower, the United States, which has unimaginable wealth and the world’s most destructive weapons, and its “coalition” accomplice, Britain, which boasts one of the world’s best “professional” armies: an army with every hi-tech weapon in its arsenal and which we are called upon to “support” in its execution of an illegal and immoral war.

Believing their own propaganda, the British and American military brass have been stunned by the Iraqi resistance. They have tried to belittle the militia defending Basra with lurid stories that its fighters are “terrorists”.

Last night the Ministry of Defence in Qatar was suggesting that “there might just be an uprising against the regime” in Basra. Even if this is true, in no way does it excuse the British assault on a civilian city. The truth is that the Iraqis, with no air power, are fighting like lions to defend not a tyrant, but their homeland.

It is a truth the overwhelming majority of decent Britons will admire; indeed, the historical comparison Tony Blair and his propagan-

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dists fear above all is that of the British defending themselves against invasion. That happened 60 years ago; now “we” are the rapacious invaders, sent by a prime minister whose deceptions are now his reputation.

Yesterday, Blair said that 400,000 Iraqi children had died in the last five years from malnutrition and related causes. He claimed that “huge stockpiles of humanitarian aid” and clean water awaited them in neighbouring Kuwait if only the Iraqi regime would allow safe passage.

In fact, voluminous evidence, including that published by the United Nations Children’s Fund, makes clear that the main reason these children have died is an enduring siege, a 12-year embargo driven by America and backed by Britain. As of last July, \$5.4 billion worth of humanitarian supplies, approved by the UN and paid for by the Iraqi government, were blocked by Washington, with the Blair government’s approval.

And now Blair’s troops are firing their Milan wire-guided missiles in order to “soften up” Basra: a city of “1,000 children under five at grave risk”, says the UN. I have walked through the crooked streets of Basra, along a street blown to pieces by an American missile. The casualties were children, of course, because children are everywhere. I held a handkerchief over my face as I stood in the swirling dust of a school playground with a teacher and several hundred malnourished youngsters.

The dust, Dr Jawad Al-Ali told me, carried “the seeds of our death”. In the children’s wards of Basra’s main hospital, deaths from a range of hitherto unseen cancers are common; and specialists like Dr Al-Ali have little doubt that up to half the population of southern Iraq will die from cancers linked to the use of a weapon of mass destruction deployed by the Americans and the British in 1991 – uranium tipped shells and missiles.

Images of bandaged and traumatised children in hospital wards are appearing on British television; but these are the acceptable faces of war. You do not see the result of a RAF Tornado’s cluster bombing. You

are not being shown children scalped by shrapnel, with little legs reduced to bloody pieces of string.

The reason given is reminiscent of the BBC's refusal almost 40 years ago to show Peter Watkins' remarkable film, *The War Game*, which graphically showed what would happen to human beings during a nuclear attack on Britain. In 1981, Sir Ian Trethowan, director-general of the BBC, said he feared for the effect on "the elderly" and on people of "limited mental intelligence".

Certainly, the unseen television images from Iraq are devastating and which I, having seen similar sights, find difficult to look at. But that is beside the point. They are the truth. Iraqi parents have to look at their mutilated children, so why shouldn't those of us, in whose name they were slaughtered, see what they see? Why shouldn't we share their shock and pain? Why shouldn't we see the true nature of this criminal invasion? Other wars were sanitised by the suppression of their visual horrors, allowing them to be repeated.

Remember it is not those who oppose this war who need to justify themselves, regardless of Blair's vainglorious calls to "support our troops". The peoples of South Africa and Indonesia and Czechoslovakia overthrew their dictatorships without the Royal Marines and the American Seventh Cavalry. In 1932, having been bombed and invaded, Iraqis threw out their British colonial rulers. In 1958, they got rid of the Hashemite monarchy and declared a republic. Indeed, Iraqis are a people who have shown they can overthrow dictators against the odds. So why have they not been able to throw out Saddam Hussein? Because the United States and Britain armed him and propped him up while it suited them, making sure that, when they grew tired of him, they alone would be the alternative to his rule and the profiteers of his nation's resources. Imperialism has always functioned like that.

The "new Iraq", as Blair likes to call it, will have many models, such as Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, all of them American conquests and American ruled until Washington allowed a vicious dic-

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tatorship to take over. Saddam Hussein only came to power in Iraq after the Americans had helped install his Ba'ath Party in 1979. "That was my favourite coup," said the CIA officer in charge.

Keep in mind the cynicism behind these truths when you next hear Blair's impassioned insincerity; and when you glimpse, if you can, the "unacceptable" images of children killed and mangled and starved in your name, and in the cause of what the prime minister calls "our simple patriotism" – the kind of patriotism, wrote Tolstoy, "that is nothing else but a means of obtaining for the rulers their ambitions and covetous desires, and for the ruled the abdication of human dignity, reason and conscience."

MICHAEL I. NIMAN / MARCH 27

Unembed your mind

“Naturally the common people don’t want war... But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them that they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.” – Nazi Reich Marshall Herman Goering at his Nuremberg War Crimes Trial

It’s not a good day when I feel compelled to start my article by quoting Adolf Hitler’s deputy – but it’s imperative at times like this not to let the lessons of history escape us. And there are many, as history is littered with the fetid carcasses of failed empires and the demented dreams that fueled them.

One thing, however, is certain: if history has taught us anything, it tells us that any society that seeks to build a global empire is doomed to painful obscurity. I can go on ad nauseam about this point, but I won’t. The crew now controlling the White House planned this war back in the late 90s under the guise of The Project for The New American Century – and they’re executing it right on schedule (read their own words at <http://www.newamericancentury.org/>).

It’s not about failed weapons inspections. The inspections failed this time for the very same reason they failed in 1998 – because the UN withdrew inspectors in advance of US bombing raids in Iraq. And today, as in 1998, another group of inspectors is coming public with accusations that the US is fabricating a threat they claim doesn’t exist. The latest such whistleblower is weapons inspector and MIT professor, Joern Siljeholm, who charged the Bush administration with misleading

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the world community. But this is old news. We know this isn't about weapons – though no doubt we'll see pictures of banned weapons paraded before willing TV cameras before the next week is out, with their actual source forever destined to be a point of contention.

The real threat is that there might not be any weapons of mass destruction – that the UN will give Iraq a clean bill of health. If this were to happen, the regime of sanctions that has crippled Iraq for the past 12 years would be over. And at least economically, a peaceful Iraq would once again become a world player and a powerful force within the OPEC oil cartel. Perhaps even a despotic lunatic like Saddam Hussein could have realized that in the 21st century, economic weapons – weapons of mass corruption – could be more powerful than weapons of mass destruction. This was the real threat. Not a dictator with a stash of bombs, but a dictator with free reign over the world's energy market.

The current war is also not a war of “good versus evil.” At least not in the sense the Bush junta would like us to think. The Geneva based World Council of Churches, representing Christian denominations from 100 countries around the world, called the war “immoral, illegal and ill-advised.” The Pope warned that the warriors would have to answer to God for their sins. The leaders of George W. Bush's own Methodist church have used strong language to condemn their parishioner's war moves, while pleading with Bush not to do what he just did, accusing him of demonstrating an “unprecedented disregard for democratic ideals.” They went on to argue that he had presented “an astonishing lack of evidence justifying such a pre-emptive attack.”

Despite near universal condemnation from religious leaders, Bush says he takes his commands from God. Son of Sam claimed to take his orders from his neighbor's dog. One scenario is just as likely as the other. For Bush to blame this war on “God” is nothing short of blasphemy – taking the Lord's name in vain.

Having launched the war for the American Century, Bush has taken “time out” at Camp David. There's no time out, however, for the nearly 300,000 American troops stuck fighting in this war. The ones I spoke

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with weren't too excited about going. This is not what they signed up for. They're a professional fighting force of idealistic Americans who signed up to defend our country if need be – not to be hijacked to fight a “war without end” for a “New American Century” or any other radical political vision of conquest. As patriotic Americans we must support our friends, relatives and neighbors serving in the military and demand their safe return home.

There's also no time out for Iraq's civilian population, living through a hell that we simply cannot imagine. If you haven't read my article entitled “Baghdad on the Hudson,” [on this site – February 6, 2003], please give it a read. One thousand missiles just rained down on a city the size of Chicago in a one-day period. Western reporters (the real ones – not the embedded counterfeits) on the scene in Baghdad report shock wave after shock wave blowing out their windows and slamming their doors. They report how residents are drugging their children to sleep while they themselves stay up night after night. They report a scene that is anything but “liberating.” The TV networks, however, call it “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” having adopted the Bush administration's Orwellian lingo. We'll free these Iraqis (and their oil) from themselves, even if it kills them.

The images of a burning Baghdad aren't alien to New Yorkers who suffered the trauma of September 11th, 2001. They know the choking clouds of toxic smoke and dust that comes from fires and collapsing buildings. And they're being forced to relive their horror as they see innocent civilians like themselves suffer though a similar nightmare. Only this time there's an added horror – these deaths are on our hands. This is what it means to be a citizen in a democracy – we are the ones who are ultimately responsible for the actions of our government. And we can't hide behind rhetoric dismissing the 2000 election as a “coup,” because such a coup is only possible with an apathetic electorate, the majority of whom didn't vote and didn't protest the theft of the election. Today, people are taking to the streets to exercise their legal right to protest – but it's too little too late. We're now seen

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globally as a rogue state – a pariah nation.

The challenge now is to stay informed. This means forget about CNN and all the other cheerleaders with their embedded “reporters.” Once they agree to the terms associated with the carrot of becoming embedded and cared for by the US military and their censors, these people cease to be reporters. Their so-called reportage offers no more news than any other “reality” TV show. British journalist, Robert Fisk, warned how, “once the invasion starts, they [embedded reporters] will lose their freedom to write what they want.” Fisk, a real journalist ducking flying debris in Baghdad, predicted that once hostilities began, we’d see the embedded crowd, “playing toy soldiers, dressing themselves up in military costumes for their nightly theatrical performances on television.” And, of course, we have, with ABC Nightline’s Ted Koppel leading the pack, looking like a foolish old man in a silly army costume, reporting about not much of anything, as bombs fall by the thousand.

And don’t believe the polls that say we’re all behind this bloodshed. If this carnage was truly popular, we wouldn’t need to be told how popular it is. The key thing to remember about polls is that without seeing the raw data behind them, they are worthless. Who are you asking? What are you asking them? And in what context are you asking the questions? Rephrasing a question to read, say, “Do you support this illegal war and the ensuing bombardment of Iraqi cities, even though weapons inspectors say Iraq poses no threat to the US and most religious leaders say it is a sinful war of aggression?” would produce quite a different set of results.

And next time you see a picture of an embedded reporter, ask yourself why are we only embedding reporters with invading troops? Why are no reporters embedded with Iraqi families huddling in their Baghdad basements? Why are no reporters embedded with the suffering families of 9-11 victims who have to relive their horror all over again – once again feeling powerless to stop a holocaust of violence? Where’s the real story? Why are we being told how to think instead of being told what’s really going on.

April

GEORGE MONBIOT / APRIL 1

It will end in disaster

So far, the liberators have succeeded only in freeing the souls of the Iraqis from their bodies. Saddam Hussein's troops have proved less inclined to surrender than they had anticipated, and the civilians less prepared to revolt. But while no one can now ignore the immediate problems this illegal war has met, we are beginning, too, to understand what should have been obvious all along: that, however this conflict is resolved, the outcome will be a disaster.

It seems to me that there are three possible results of the war with Iraq. The first, which is now beginning to look unlikely, is that Saddam Hussein is swiftly dispatched, his generals and ministers abandon their posts and the people who had been cowed by his militias and his secret police rise up and greet the invaders with their long-awaited blessing of flowers and rice. The troops are welcomed into Baghdad, and start preparing for what the US administration claims will be a transfer of power to a democratic government.

For a few weeks, this will look like victory. Then several things are likely to happen. The first is that, elated by its reception in Baghdad, the American government decides, as Donald Rumsfeld hinted again last week, to visit its perpetual war upon another nation: Syria, Iran, Yemen, Somalia, North Korea or anywhere else whose conquest may be calculated to enhance the stature of the president and the scope of his empire. It is almost as if Bush and his advisers are determined to meet the nemesis which their hubris invites.

Our next discovery is likely to be, as John Gray pointed out some months ago, that the choice of regimes in the Middle East is not a choice between secular dictatorship and secular democracy, but

between secular dictatorship and Islamic democracy. What the people of the Middle East want and what the US government says they want appear to be rather different things, and the tension between the two objectives will be a source of instability and conflict until western governments permit those people to make their own choices unmolested. That is unlikely to happen until the oil runs out. The Iraqis may celebrate their independence by embracing a long-suppressed fundamentalism, and the United States may respond by seeking to crush it.

The coalition might also soon discover why Saddam Hussein became such an abhorrent dictator. Iraq is a colonial artefact, forced together by the British from three Ottoman provinces, whose people have wildly different religious and ethnic loyalties. It is arguable that this absurd construction can be sustained only by brute force.

A US-backed administration seeking to keep this nation of warring factions intact may rapidly encounter Saddam's problem, and, in so doing, rediscover his solution. Perhaps we should not be surprised to see that George Bush's government was, until recently, planning merely to replace the two most senior officials in each of Saddam's ministries, leaving the rest of his government undisturbed.

The alternative would be to permit Iraq to fall apart. While fragmentation may, in the long run, be the only feasible future for its people, it is impossible, in the short term, to see how this could happen without bloodshed, as every faction seeks to carve out its domain. Whether the US tries to oversee this partition or flees from it as the British did from India, its victory in these circumstances is likely to sour very quickly.

The second possible outcome of this war is that the US kills Saddam and destroys the bulk of his army, but has to govern Iraq as a hostile occupying force. Saddam Hussein, whose psychological warfare appears to be rather more advanced than that of the Americans, may have ensured that this is now the most likely result.

The coalition forces cannot win without taking Baghdad, and Saddam is seeking to ensure that they cannot take Baghdad without

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killing thousands of civilians. His soldiers will shelter in homes, schools and hospitals. In trying to destroy them, the American and British troops may blow away the last possibility of winning the hearts and minds of the residents. Saddam's deployment of suicide bombers has already obliged the coalition forces to deal brutally with innocent civilians.

The comparisons with Palestine will not be lost on the Iraqis, or on anyone in the Middle East. The United States, like Israel, will discover that occupation is bloody and, ultimately, unsustainable. Its troops will be harassed by snipers and suicide bombers, and its response to them will alienate even the people who were grateful for the overthrow of Saddam. We can expect the US, in these circumstances, hurriedly to proclaim victory, install a feeble and doomed Iraqi government, and pull out before the whole place crashes down around it. What happens after that, to Iraq and the rest of the Middle East, is anyone's guess, but I think we can anticipate that it won't be pleasant.

The third possibility is that the coalition forces fail swiftly to kill or capture Saddam Hussein or to win a decisive victory in Iraq. While still unlikely, this is now an outcome which cannot be entirely dismissed. Saddam may be too smart to wait in his bunker for a bomb big enough to reach him, but might, like King Alfred, slip into the civilian population, occasionally throwing off his disguise and appearing among his troops, to keep the flame of liberation burning.

If this happens, then the US will have transformed him from the hated oppressor into the romantic, almost mythological hero of Arab and Muslim resistance, the Salah al-Din of his dreams. He will be seen as the man who could do to the United States what the mujahideen of Afghanistan did to the Soviet Union: drawing it so far into an unwinnable war that its economy and its popular support collapse. The longer he survives, the more the population - not just of Iraq, but of all Muslim countries - will turn towards him, and the less likely a western victory becomes.

The US will almost certainly then have engineered the improbable

chimera it claims to be chasing: the marriage of Saddam's well-armed secular brutality and al-Qaida's global insurrection. Even if, having held out for many weeks or months, Saddam Hussein is found and killed, his spirit may continue to inspire a revolt throughout the Muslim world, against the Americans, the British and, of course, Israel. Pakistan's unpopular leader, Pervez Musharraf, would then find himself in serious trouble. If, as seems likely in these circumstances, he is overthrown in an Islamic revolt, then a fundamentalist regime, deeply hostile to the west, would possess real nuclear weapons, primed and ready to fire.

I hope I've missed something here, and will be proved spectacularly wrong, but it seems to me that the American and British governments have dragged us into a mess from which we might not emerge for many years. They have unlocked the spirit of war, and it could be unwilling to return to its casket until it has traversed the world.

MICHAEL I. NIMAN / APRIL 14

Toppling reality – image warfare in Iraq

The American media is awash in images of cheering Iraqis welcoming their American “liberators.” Our visual lexicon will forever contain toppling Saddam statues along with images of a falling Berlin wall, crumbling Twin Towers, Iwo Jima flag raising and a naked Vietnamese girl running from a napalm attack.

Network anchors are obsessively telling us we’re witnessing history. And we are. It’s just not the history they’re telling us we’re watching. What we are seeing is the ultimate triumph of the image – with the pivotal battles of war playing out in the theater of informatics. Welcome to the post-modern media war.

Last week’s toppling of a Central Baghdad statue of Saddam Hussein marked the turning point in the Iraq invasion. Pundits were tripping over themselves to compare this new image to the destruction of the Berlin wall. But, in reality, there’s one main difference. The German people tore down the Berlin wall. Saddam’s statue was pulled down by an invading army. Ultimately, who pulled the statue down is unimportant. What’s important is the image of the statue falling.

Marshall McLuhan once said that World War Three would be an information war. We’re certainly seeing that. From a military perspective, the US invasion plan initially didn’t make much sense – with US forces recklessly pushing forward, without securing their supply lines or any territory along the way. If the battle in Baghdad proved to be drawn out, American troops would have found themselves in a very precarious situation. But the plan was never really to fight a drawn out battle – it was to create the illusion of victory. Once the illusion was created, reality would soon follow suit.

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Here's how it worked. US forces charged forward and put Ted Koppel in the Baghdad Airport before the area was secured – creating the TV image of US forces “in Baghdad.” Next, on April 9th, they made a bloody stab into the heart of Baghdad. The cost in civilian lives of that incursion was staggering, with the International Red Cross complaining that they were overwhelmed and could no longer accurately count casualties. The point of this move was not to secure territory per se, but to secure an image – the now famous scene of a toppling Saddam. The US was careful to not knock out electric power across Iraq – so that once the images were broadcast around the world, Iraqis with satellite dishes quickly saw them, too. The image said the war was over. And within moments, the government of Iraq, such as it was, dissolved into oblivion. As word spread that US troops were in Baghdad, Iraqi soldiers peeled their uniforms off, and the war, more or less, faded to pockets of resistance.

The statue event quickly became a metaphor for “liberation.” NPR reported how Iraqis first tried chipping away at the legs of the bronze dictator, then at the concrete base, before ultimately asking the US forces to assist. The images that we saw, however, were tightly controlled and scripted. Dozens celebrated while millions hid in mortal terror. We have no idea who the people in this all male “crowd” were, who brought them to the square, why they didn't fear the otherwise trigger-happy American troops or why those troops didn't fear them or think they were among the 4,000 suicide bombers the media told us entered the country? This wasn't a time to ask questions.

And nobody was likely to venture out to ask questions. That's because on April 8th, US forces, in a preliminary raid on Baghdad, fired a tank mortar into the Reuters “office” in the Palestine hotel, launched an air strike on Al Jazeera's office, and attacked the office of Al Jazeera's main competition, Abu Dhabi TV, with small arms fire. When all the shooting was done, a Reuters correspondent, a Spanish Telecinco correspondent and one of Al Jazeera's best known correspondents were dead. Six other journalists were wounded. According to Reporters

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Without Borders, “The US Army deliberately and without warning targeted journalists.” The Committee to Protect Journalists declared that the US violated the Geneva Convention by attacking journalists.

Pentagon officials claim they were simply “returning fire” after being fired upon with rockets from the Palestine hotel. Robert Fisk, reporting for the London-based Independent witnessed the attack, and reported hearing no fire before the tank attack. He described the attack as “looking very much like murder.” According to journalists from a host of diverse countries, there was no weapons fire in the area prior to the US attack on the journalists’ hotel. Witnesses say the tank, over a period of two minutes, sat facing the hotel, adjusting its gun barrel to point to the 15th floor Reuters office, and fired – a scene caught on videotape by a French TV crew.

Pentagon officials also claim they were being fired on from the Al Jazeera and Abu Dhabi TV offices as well – charges that the journalists adamantly deny. US forces also shelled an Al Jazeera office in Basra on April 2nd and shot at a clearly marked Al Jazeera vehicle on April 7th.

The end result of these attacks is that most journalists not “embedded” with the US military were basically pinned down under fire and unable to move easily or safely about Baghdad when the “fall of Baghdad” images of a toppling Saddam were recorded by embedded journalists. Hence, the US military public relations forces had near absolute control of the images being produced.

The powerful images of the Saddam statue’s bronze head being dragged through the streets of Baghdad also bore signs of being choreographed, albeit poorly. By freezing the frame of the televised image, one can see that a third of the supposed celebrants being photographed were themselves photojournalists. The image, however, still served its purpose.

In the American press nobody questioned the fact that the footage shot by embedded journalists of the initial images of Iraqis cheering on their American “liberators” was looped, with the same few seconds running over and over again. Once these images entered our visual lex-

icon, reality followed suit – and we suddenly were awash in images of Shock and Awe survivors suddenly celebrating their liberation. But these images were severed from history and without context. Pundits compared them to World War II era shots of French citizens cheering on their American liberators – but absent from this dialog was any reference to near identical images of citizens cheering on their supposed German “liberators” as the Nazis brutally marched across Europe.

The sad reality is that people quickly adapt to political realities and suck up to whoever is in power – often as quick as possible. Hence we quickly saw images of Iraqis carrying pictures of George W. Bush – and we quickly forgot that they were carrying around similar images of Saddam Hussein last month. For people weaned on generations of totalitarian oppression and colonial occupation, such behavior typifies survivors. We certainly shouldn’t humor ourselves into believing we are loved – we’re just the new game in town. And people are hungry.

The images are powerful – and they are toxic to a democratic discourse. They are extremely sophisticated and designed to elicit an emotional response – which should quickly trump a rational response. Watching these images reminds me of the final scenes of George Orwell’s classic work, 1984. Life would be much easier if we could just learn to be like everyone else and love big brother – cheering on the global conquests. Even the best-read peace activist feels a twinge of self-doubt. That wasn’t so bad. Then the SUV ad comes on. And it doesn’t look so bad. If only we could get with the program. This is what propaganda theorists call the bandwagon effect. People like to cheer for perceived “winners.” There’s a natural urge to suck up to power; to line the streets and celebrate your own destruction – as we saw in Nazi Germany.

Then the horror of reality sinks in. The endless deaths. The endless war. Boundless hate. Generations of terror. And the Pearly Gates slammed shut in your face because, whether or not you voted for George W. Bush, you’re a citizen in a democratic country and this travesty occurred under your watch.

JOHN PILGER / APRIL 14

This is a crime against humanity

BBC television producer, moments before he was wounded by an American fighter aircraft that killed 18 people with “friendly fire”, spoke to his mother on a satellite phone. Holding the phone over his head so that she could hear the sound of the American planes overhead, he said: “Listen, that’s the sound of freedom.”

Did I read this scene in *Catch-22*? Surely, the BBC man was being ferociously ironic. I doubt it, just as I doubt that whoever designed the Observer’s page three last Sunday had Joseph Heller in mind when he wrote the weasel headline: “The moment young Omar discovered the price of war”. These cowardly words accompanied a photograph of an American marine reaching out to comfort 15-year-old Omar, having just participated in the mass murder of his father, mother, two sisters and brother during the unprovoked invasion of their homeland, in breach of the most basic law of civilised peoples.

No true epitaph for them in Britain’s famous liberal newspaper; no honest headline, such as: “This American marine murdered this boy’s family”. No photograph of Omar’s father, mother, sisters and brother dismembered and blood-soaked by automatic fire. Versions of the Observer’s propaganda picture have been appearing in the Anglo-American press since the invasion began: tender cameos of American troops reaching out, kneeling, ministering to their “liberated” victims.

And where were the pictures from the village of Furat, where 80 men, women and children were rocketed to death? Apart from the *Mirror*, where were the pictures, and footage, of small children holding up their hands in terror while Bush’s thugs forced their families to kneel in the street? Imagine that in a British high street. It is a glimpse

of fascism, and we have a right to see it.

“To initiate a war of aggression,” said the judges in the Nuremberg trial of the Nazi leadership, “is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.” In stating this guiding principle of international law, the judges specifically rejected German arguments of the “necessity” for pre-emptive attacks against other countries.

Nothing Bush and Blair, their cluster-bombing boys and their media court do now will change the truth of their great crime in Iraq. It is a matter of record, understood by the majority of humanity, if not by those who claim to speak for “us”. As Denis Halliday said of the Anglo-American embargo against Iraq, it will “slaughter them in the history books”. It was Halliday who, as assistant secretary general of the United Nations, set up the “oil for food” programme in Iraq in 1996 and quickly realised that the UN had become an instrument of “a genocidal attack on a whole society”. He resigned in protest, as did his successor, Hans von Sponeck, who described “the wanton and shaming punishment of a nation”.

I have mentioned these two men often in these pages, partly because their names and their witness have been airbrushed from most of the media. I well remember Jeremy Paxman bellowing at Halliday on Newsnight shortly after his resignation: “So are you an apologist for Saddam Hussein?” That helped set the tone for the travesty of journalism that now daily, almost gleefully, treats criminal war as sport. In a leaked e-mail Roger Mosey, the head of BBC Television News, described the BBC’s war coverage as “extraordinary – it almost feels like World Cup football when you go from Um Qasr to another theatre of war somewhere else and you’re switching between battles”.

He is talking about murder. That is what the Americans do, and no one will say so, even when they are murdering journalists. They bring to this one-sided attack on a weak and mostly defenceless people the same racist, homicidal intent I witnessed in Vietnam, where they had

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a whole programme of murder called Operation Phoenix. This runs through all their foreign wars, as it does through their own divided society. Take your pick of the current onslaught. Last weekend, a column of their tanks swept heroically into Baghdad and out again. They murdered people along the way.

They blew off the limbs of women and the scalps of children. Hear their voices on the unedited and unbroadcast videotape: “We shot the shit out of it.” Their victims overwhelm the morgues and hospitals – hospitals already denuded of drugs and painkillers by America’s deliberate withholding of \$5.4bn in humanitarian goods, approved by the Security Council and paid for by Iraq. The screams of children undergoing amputation with minimal anaesthetic qualify as the BBC man’s “sound of freedom”.

Heller would appreciate the sideshows. Take the British helicopter pilot who came to blows with an American who had almost shot him down. “Don’t you know the Iraqis don’t have a fucking air force?” he shouted. Did this pilot reflect on the truth he had uttered, on the whole craven enterprise against a stricken third world country and his own part in this crime? I doubt it. The British have been the most skilled at delusion and lying. By any standard, the Iraqi resistance to the high-tech Anglo-American machine was heroic. With ancient tanks and mortars, small arms and desperate ambushes, they panicked the Americans and reduced the British military class to one of its specialties – mendacious condescension.

The Iraqis who fight are “terrorists”, “hoodlums”, “pockets of Ba’ath Party loyalists”, “kamikaze” and “feds” (fedayeen). They are not real people: cultured and cultivated people. They are Arabs. This vocabulary of dishonour has been faithfully parroted by those enjoying it all from the broadcasting box. “What do you make of Basra?” asked the Today programme’s presenter of a former general embedded in the studio. “It’s hugely encouraging, isn’t it?” he replied. Their mutual excitement, like their plummy voices, are their bond.

On the same day, in a Guardian letter, Tim Llewellyn, a former BBC

Middle East correspondent, pointed us to evidence of this “hugely encouraging” truth – fleeting pictures on Sky News of British soldiers smashing their way into a family home in Basra, pointing their guns at a woman and manhandling, hooding and manacled young men, one of whom was shown quivering with terror. “Is Britain ‘liberating’ Basra by taking political prisoners and, if so, based on what sort of intelligence, given Britain’s long unfamiliarity with this territory and its inhabitants . . . The least this ugly display will do is remind Arabs and Muslims everywhere of our Anglo-Saxon double standards – we can show your prisoners in . . . degrading positions, but don’t you dare show ours.”.

Roger Mosey says the suffering of Um Qasr is “like World Cup football”. There are 40,000 people in Um Qasr; desperate refugees are streaming in and the hospitals are overflowing. All this misery is due entirely to the “coalition” invasion and the British siege, which forced the United Nations to withdraw its humanitarian aid staff. Cafod, the Catholic relief agency, which has sent a team to Um Qasr, says the standard humanitarian quota for water in emergency situations is 20 litres per person per day.

Cafod reports hospitals entirely without water and people drinking from contaminated wells. According to the World Health Organisation, 1.5 million people across southern Iraq are without water, and epidemics are inevitable. And what are “our boys” doing to alleviate this, apart from staging childish, theatrical occupations of presidential palaces, having fired shoulder-held missiles into a civilian city and dropped cluster bombs?

A British colonel laments to his “embedded” flock that “it is difficult to deliver aid in an area that is still an active battle zone”. The logic of his own words mocks him. If Iraq was not a battle zone, if the British and the Americans were not defying international law, there would be no difficulty in delivering aid.

There is something especially disgusting about the lurid propaganda coming from these PR-trained British officers, who have not a clue

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about Iraq and its people. They describe the liberation they are bringing from “the world’s worst tyranny”, as if anything, including death by cluster bomb or dysentery, is better than “life under Saddam”. The inconvenient truth is that, according to Unicef, the Ba’athists built the most modern health service in the Middle East.

No one disputes the grim, totalitarian nature of the regime; but Saddam Hussein was careful to use the oil wealth to create a modern secular society and a large and prosperous middle class. Iraq was the only Arab country with a 90 per cent clean water supply and with free education. All this was smashed by the Anglo-American embargo. When the embargo was imposed in 1990, the Iraqi civil service organised a food distribution system that the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation described as “a model of efficiency . . . undoubtedly saving Iraq from famine”. That, too, was smashed when the invasion was launched.

Why are the British yet to explain why their troops have to put on protective suits to recover dead and wounded in vehicles hit by American “friendly fire”? The reason is that the Americans are using solid uranium coated on missiles and tank shells. When I was in southern Iraq, doctors estimated a sevenfold increase in cancers in areas where depleted uranium was used by the Americans and British in the 1991 war. Under the subsequent embargo, Iraq, unlike Kuwait, has been denied equipment with which to clean up its contaminated battlefields. The hospitals in Basra have wards overflowing with children with cancers of a variety not seen before 1991. They have no painkillers; they are fortunate if they have aspirin.

With honourable exceptions (Robert Fisk; al-Jazeera), little of this has been reported. Instead, the media have performed their preordained role as imperial America’s “soft power”: rarely identifying “our” crime, or misrepresenting it as a struggle between good intentions and evil incarnate. This abject professional and moral failure now beckons the unseen dangers of such an epic, false victory, inviting its repetition in Iran, Korea, Syria, Cuba, China.

George Bush has said: "It will be no defence to say: 'I was just following orders.'" He is correct. The Nuremberg judges left in no doubt the right of ordinary soldiers to follow their conscience in an illegal war of aggression. Two British soldiers have had the courage to seek status as conscientious objectors. They face court martial and imprisonment; yet virtually no questions have been asked about them in the media. George Galloway has been pilloried for asking the same question as Bush, and he and Tam Dalyell, Father of the House of Commons, are being threatened with withdrawal of the Labour whip.

Dalyell, 41 years a member of the Commons, has said the Prime Minister is a war criminal who should be sent to The Hague. This is not gratuitous; on the prima facie evidence, Blair is a war criminal, and all those who have been, in one form or another, accessories should be reported to the International Criminal Court. Not only did they promote a charade of pretexts few now take seriously, they brought terrorism and death to Iraq.

A growing body of legal opinion around the world agrees that the new court has a duty, as Eric Herring of Bristol University wrote, to investigate "not only the regime, but also the UN bombing and sanctions which violated the human rights of Iraqis on a vast scale". Add the present piratical war, whose spectre is the uniting of Arab nationalism with militant Islam. The whirlwind sown by Blair and Bush is just beginning. Such is the magnitude of their crime.

NORMAN SOLOMON / APRIL 24

Media nix: Blix, Kucinich and the Dixie Chicks

Hans Blix, Dennis Kucinich and the Dixie Chicks are in very different lines of work – but they’re in the same line of fire from big media for the sin of strongly challenging the president’s war agenda. Let’s start with Blix, who can get respectful coverage in American media – unless he’s criticizing the U.S. government. Belatedly, in mid-April, he went public with accusations that the Bush administration faked evidence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. And Blix declared that the United Nations – not the U.S. government – should deploy arms inspectors in Iraq now.

But presidential spokesman Ari Fleischer retorted: “I think it’s unfortunate if Hans Blix would in any way criticize the United States at his juncture.” The White House message was clear – and it reached the media echo chamber.

So, on the April 22 edition of CNN’s “Moneyline” program, host Lou Dobbs (with an American flag pin in his lapel) summed up a news report this way: “Blix appearing for all the world to look like a petulant U.N. bureaucrat about a month to go before his retirement.”

Mainstream U.S. reporters rarely apply an adjective like “petulant” to petulant administration officials like, say, Ari Fleischer. But then again, Fleischer doesn’t challenge U.S. foreign policy.

Dennis Kucinich does. The four-term U.S. representative from Ohio is now running for the Democratic presidential nomination. And some media pundits find his anti-war views outrageous.

A few weeks before President Bush launched an undeclared war on Iraq, “liberal” Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen declared his own war on Kucinich. The main trigger for Cohen’s wrath was that the

member of Congress had dared to identify oil as “the strongest incentive” for the impending war.

Cohen claimed to be shocked shocked shocked. The first word of his column was “liar.” From there, the Post columnist peppered his piece with references to Kucinich as an “indomitable demagogue” and a “fool” who was “repeating a lie.” But Cohen would have done well to re-read a front page of his own newspaper.

Five months earlier, on Sept. 15, a page-one Post report carried the headline “In Iraqi War Scenario, Oil Is Key Issue; U.S. Drillers Eye Huge Petroleum Pool.” In the article, Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the U.S.-backed Iraqi National Congress, said that he favored the creation of a U.S.-led consortium to develop oil fields in a post-Saddam Iraq: “American companies will have a big shot at Iraqi oil.”

The same Post article quoted former CIA Director James Woolsey – a Chalabi supporter who, according to a Legal Times story, has been on the payroll of Chalabi’s group. Woolsey said: “France and Russia have oil companies and interests in Iraq. They should be told that if they are of assistance in moving Iraq toward decent government, we’ll do the best we can to ensure that the new government and American companies work closely with them. If they throw in their lot with Saddam, it will be difficult to the point of impossible to persuade the new Iraqi government to work with them.”

As many business pages have long highlighted, it’s actually quite reasonable to identify oil as key to U.S. policy toward Iraq. But such talk from a presidential candidate causes some people to become incensed. That hardly makes Kucinich a “liar.” On the contrary, it simply makes him a pariah in the media realms patrolled by the likes of Richard Cohen.

Similar media gendarmes are on patrol over the airwaves. The giant corporate owner of more than 1,200 radio stations, Clear Channel, syndicates talk radio host Glenn Beck to scores of stations nationwide – and Beck is enraged about Kucinich. Days before the all-out war on Iraq began, Beck discussed spontaneous combustion and then said:

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“Every night I get down on my knees and pray that Dennis Kucinich will burst into flames.”

Beck has been a chief on-air organizer of de facto pro-war rallies promoted by Clear Channel, a monopolistic corporation with close ties to President Bush. Those rallies included vilification of the Dixie Chicks, a country music group that earned the wrath of hyper-patriots several weeks ago when lead singer Natalie Maines, a Texan, said she was ashamed to be from the same state as Bush.

While the controversy did not do much harm to sales of their music, the Dixie Chicks have suffered a sharp drop in air play. Most fans don't seem to mind the anti-war sentiment, but some radio industry executives sure do. “What's clear is that in these days of highly concentrated media ownership,” says the Chicago area's Daily Herald, “there is an immense amount of pressure to not make waves.”

In a new statement that voiced support for the Dixie Chicks as “terrific American artists expressing American values by using their American right to free speech,” rocker Bruce Springsteen condemned “the pressure coming from the government and big business to enforce conformity of thought concerning the war and politics.”

Being a dissenter from conventional wisdom has always involved risks – but rarely have major media powerhouses in the United States been so eager to dismiss thoughtful opinions with the wave of a patriotic wand.

May

GEORGE MONBIOT / MAY 20

Let's hear it for Belgium

Belgium is becoming an interesting country. In the course of a week, it has managed to upset both liberal opinion in Europe— by granting the far-right Vlaams Blok 18 parliamentary seats— and illiberal opinion in the US. On Wednesday, a human rights lawyer filed a case with the federal prosecutors whose purpose is to arraign Thomas Franks, the commander of the American troops in Iraq, for crimes against humanity. This may be the only judicial means, anywhere on earth, of holding the US government to account for its actions.

The case has been filed in Belgium, on behalf of 17 Iraqis and two Jordanians, because Belgium has a law permitting foreigners to be tried for war crimes, irrespective of where they were committed. The suit has little chance of success, for the law was hastily amended by the government at the beginning of this month. But the fact that the plaintiffs had no choice but to seek redress in Belgium speaks volumes about the realities of Tony Blair's vision for a world order led by the US, built on democracy and justice.

Franks appears to have a case to answer. The charges fall into four categories: the use of cluster bombs; the killing of civilians by other means; attacks on the infrastructure essential for public health; and the failure to prevent the looting of hospitals. There is plenty of supporting evidence.

US forces dropped around 1,500 cluster bombs from the air and fired an unknown quantity from artillery pieces. British troops fired 2,100. Each contained several hundred bomblets, which fragment into shrapnel. Between 200 and 400 Iraqi civilians were killed by them during the war. Others, mostly children, continue to be killed by those bomblets

which failed to explode when they hit the ground. The effects of their deployment in residential areas were both predictable and predicted. This suggests that their use there breached protocol II to the Geneva conventions, which prohibits “violence to the life, health and physical or mental well-being” of non-combatants.

On several occasions, US troops appear to have opened fire on unarmed civilians. In Nassiriya, they shot at any vehicle that approached their positions. In one night alone they killed 12 civilians. On a bridge on the outskirts of Baghdad they shot 15 in two days. Last month, US troops fired on peaceful demonstrators in Mosul, killing seven, and in Falluja, killing 13 and injuring 75. All these actions appear to offend the fourth convention.

The armed forces also deliberately destroyed civilian infrastructure, bombing the electricity lines upon which water treatment plants depended, with the result that cholera and dysentery have spread. Protocol II prohibits troops from attacking “objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population such as ... drinking water installations and supplies”.

The fourth convention also insists that an occupying power is responsible for “ensuring and maintaining ... the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory”. Yet when the US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld was asked why his troops had failed to prevent the looting of public buildings, he replied: “Stuff happens. Free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things.” Many hospitals remain closed or desperately under-supplied. On several occasions US soldiers acted on orders to fire at Iraqi ambulances, killing or wounding their occupants. They shot at the medical crews which came to retrieve the dead and wounded at the demonstration in Falluja. The Geneva conventions suggest that these are straightforward war crimes: “Medical units and transports shall be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack.”

The armed forces of the US, in other words, appear to have taken

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short cuts while prosecuting their war with Iraq. Some of these may have permitted them to conclude their war more swiftly, but at the expense of the civilian population. Repeatedly, in some cases systematically, US soldiers appear to have broken the laws of war.

We should not be surprised to learn that the US government has responded to the suit with outrage. The state department has warned Belgium that it will punish nations which permit their laws to be used for “political ends”. The Belgian government hasn’t waited to discover what this means. It has amended the law and denounced the lawyer who filed the case.

The Bush government’s response would doubtless be explained by its apologists as a measure of its insistence upon and respect for national sovereignty. But while the US forbids other nations to proscribe the actions of its citizens, it also insists that its own laws should apply abroad. The foreign sovereignty immunities act, for example, permits the US courts to prosecute foreigners for harming commercial interests in the US, even if they are breaking no laws within their own countries. The Helms-Burton Act allows the courts in America to confiscate the property of foreign companies which do business with Cuba. The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act instructs the government to punish foreign firms investing in the oil or gas sectors in those countries. The message these laws send is this: you can’t prosecute us, but we can prosecute you.

Of course, the sensible means of resolving legal disputes between nations is the use of impartial, multinational tribunals, such as the international criminal court in the Hague. But impartial legislation is precisely what the US government will not contemplate. When the ICC treaty was being negotiated, the US demanded that its troops should be exempt from prosecution, and the UN security council gave it what it wanted. The US also helped to ensure that the court’s writ runs only in the nations which have ratified the treaty. Its soldiers in Iraq would thus have been exempt in any case, as Saddam Hussein’s government was one of seven which voted against the formation of the

court in 1998. The others were China, Israel, Libya, Qatar, Yemen and the US. This is the company the American government keeps when it comes to international law.

To ensure that there was not the slightest possibility that his servicemen need fear the rule of law, George W Bush signed a new piece of extra-territorial legislation last year, which permits the US “to use all means necessary and appropriate to bring about the release” of US citizens being tried in the court. This appears to include the invasion of the capital of the Netherlands.

All this serves to illustrate the grand mistake Tony Blair is making. The empire he claims to influence entertains no interest in his moral posturing. Its vision of justice between nations is the judicial oubliette of Guantanamo Bay. The idea that it might be subject to the international rule of law, and therefore belong to a world order in which other nations can participate, is as unthinkable in Washington as a six-month public holiday. If Blair does not understand this, he has missed the entire point of US foreign policy. If he does understand it, he has misled us as to the purpose of his own diplomacy.

The US government does not respect the law between nations. It is the law.

MICHAEL I. NIMAN / MAY 20

9/11: Ask no questions, you'll get no lies

In 1996 Bill Clinton had an affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. On September 11th, 2001, terrorists hijacked four jetliners and used them to attack the Pentagon and destroy the World Trade Center. The Lewinsky affair involved a White House intern performing oral sex on the President. Congress created an independent office to investigate the affair and appointed a special prosecutor to prosecute any individuals caught breaking the law. The affair dominated the world media for two years and ultimately led to the impeachment of President Clinton.

The 9/11 attacks, by contrast, resulted in 3,000 Americans being killed. The ensuing domino effect resulted in the death of over 10,000 Afghans and Iraqis, the collapse of the US economy, the decline of the American dollar. It also led to the onset of political amnesia regarding Enron and other corporate scandals, conflicts of interest running rampant in the Bush regime and the illegitimacy of the 2000 presidential election. To date, however, there has not been an independent investigation of the events leading up to the 9/11 attacks. A bi-partisan committee appointed by congress and led by a former Pentagon inspector general compiled an 800 page report primarily about intelligence community warnings prior to 9/11. It was completed in December, but its release has been suppressed by the Bush regime. The media has been all but silent on this issue.

Normally, though I'm no fan of the Clinton administration, I don't write about the Lewinsky affair, which I've always found to be boring and trivial. But it seems like a good starting point to compare the media's treatment of a few blowjobs and the ensuing lies about blowjobs, with its treatment of what's become known as the "Attack

on America” and the new reactionary political culture the attack has ushered in. One was clearly over-reported, while the other now receives scant mention from a quisling press corps.

It’s nothing short of outrageous that as we approach the second anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, we have still not seen the results of any investigation regarding these charges— this despite a plethora of very disturbing international press reports raising horrifying questions about Bush regime complicity, duplicity or incompetence. And we are still only at the stage where a few lone congressional voices are calling in vain for hearings that in all likelihood will never take place.

One story that should now be dominating the American press is that of the aforementioned 800 page congressional report. The report, according to preliminary releases dating back to last year, demonstrates that US intelligence agencies were aware of al Qaeda’s plans to use commercial airliners as terrorist weapons and made those concerns known to George W. Bush and his top advisors. Weeks before September 11th, the Central Intelligence Agency reported to the White House that Osama bin Laden’s network was planning imminent attacks on US soil which would be “spectacular and designed to inflict mass casualties.” They went on to warn the Bush regime that the “attack will occur with little or no warning.”

The report, according to Newsweek, “names names, gives dates and provides a body of new information about the handling of many other crucial intelligence briefings— including one in early August 2001 given to national-security advisor Rice that discussed al Qaeda operations within the United States and the possibility that the group’s members might seek to hijack airplanes.” These briefings followed warnings, issued to the Bush White House by Italian, Israeli, Jordanian, Egyptian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Russian, Malaysian, Filipino and British intelligence agencies, which reported that al Qaeda was planning a major terrorist operation in the US. Many of these agencies accurately speculated upon both the targets and the means by which they would be attacked. The Filipino report, according to The New York Times,

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detailed the cross-country odyssey of one would-be terrorist as he attended flight schools in New York, Texas, California and North Carolina in order to learn the skills needed to precisely fly a jumbo jet directly into a building.

The FBI in Oklahoma, as early as 1998, in a memo titled, “Weapons of Mass Destruction,” warned that suspicious foreigners were receiving flight training for no apparent reason, and that they might be part of a plot to use airliners in the manner in which they were eventually used on 9/11. In the months leading up to 9/11, other FBI offices around the country followed suit, warning about the potential use of airplanes as terrorist weapons, with the most recent warning coming out of the Phoenix office in July of 2002, less than two months before 9/11. Officials in Minneapolis were more specific, and had already identified Zacarias Moussaoui as one of the would-be hijackers. The Bush regime’s only visible responses to these warnings were Attorney General John Ashcroft’s July 26th, 2001 decision to stop flying on commercial airliners and the Bush regime’s now documented order for the FBI to back off on its investigation of al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.

The congressional report, which promises to shed light on some of the questions concerning the Bush regime and the 9/11 attacks, was completed in December of 2002 despite a lack of cooperation from key players such as Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld. On December 10th, both the Senate and House intelligence committees determined that the report contained no classified information and voted to release the report to the public. The Bush administration, however, argued that the report still needed to be “scrubbed” of classified information and blocked its release for the last five months. Hence, they blocked the release of the report, which is essentially a critique of their behavior and performance. They did this by declaring major sections, such as those detailing when George W. Bush was informed and what he was informed of, to be “classified” information whose release would compromise US security.

Critics, however, point out that what the report would actually

compromise would be Bush's 2004 presidential election campaign. Early indicators show that with unemployment and the deficit skyrocketing, public services declining, the economy in ruins, environmental degradation increasing, public education and healthcare going to hell, and chaos rampant in Central Asia and the Middle East, a re-election for a never elected president would be a hard sell.

Hence, the emerging Republican strategy is to wrap Bush in the flag and re-run lots of 9/11 "united we stand" footage, pushing the wartime president myth. To this end, the Republicans scheduled their convention, planned for New York City, to occur in early September 2004. This will be the latest date that the Republicans have ever held a convention, but it promises a priceless tie-in with 9/11 commemorative events.

The plan shamelessly dishonors the 9/11 dead by turning their commemoration into a sort of Bush rally, with George W. emerging Giuliani style as "America's President" while going into the final stretch of his election campaign—avoiding issues at all cost. Images of Bush sitting on 9/11 warnings, allowing the horror of 9/11 to unfold either through incompetence or malfeasance, would poison this strategy.

The Bush team is going further than simply suppressing the report and thwarting any further investigation. They're attempting to "reclassify" information that's already in the public domain, such as the July 2001 "Phoenix memo" referred to in this article, in which FBI agents warn about suspicious foreigners enrolling in US flight schools to learn how to fly, but not necessarily land, jetliners. Such reclassification of information already in the public domain and internationally distributed is unprecedented. If the Bush White House succeeds in carrying through on their reclassification plans, it will make republishing this story, or possibly even possessing a copy of it, illegal. Most interesting is the clear fact that the Phoenix memo, like other documents the Bush regime wants to classify or reclassify, in no way compromises American national security. This is a clear abuse of power and a severe threat to our constitutionally guaranteed right of free speech— with a president attempting to criminalize any rhetoric critical of his performance.

NORMAN SOLOMON / MAY 22

Decoding the media fixation on terrorism

By now, it's a media ritual. Whenever the U.S. government raises the alert level for terrorism – as when officials announced the orange code for “high risk” on May 20 – local, regional and national news stories assess the dangers and report on what's being done to protect us. We're kept well-informed about how worried to be at any particular time. But all that media churning includes remarkably little that has any practical utility.

Presumably, the agencies that are supposed to help safeguard the public don't need to get their directives via network news or the morning paper. As for the rest of us, the publicity is very close to useless—unless we're supposed to believe that feeling anxious makes us safer or looking sideways at strangers will enhance our security.

Americans could be much better protected if journalists found other uses for some of that ink and air time. For instance, a lot of lives would be saved if news outlets did more to encourage people to stop smoking and avoid excessive alcohol intake. For that matter, public health could benefit greatly if media did a better job of confronting politicians who refuse to tighten laws against air pollution.

But the media fixation on terrorism does nothing to step on the toes of the tobacco and alcohol industries (which provide millions of dollars in ad revenues every day). Nor does the news focus on terrorism do anything to challenge polluting corporations and their governmental enablers.

In mid-May, the internationally syndicated columnist Gwynne Dyer wrote a piece noting that the previous week had brought news reports of terrorist attacks in Chechnya, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Morocco and

Israel, resulting in a total of 153 deaths. He observed: “Last week was the worst for terrorist attacks since Sept. 11, 2001. ... Yet there were no headlines last weekend saying ‘750 people dead of gunshot wounds in the U.S. since Monday’ or ‘Weekly traffic death toll in India tops 2,000,’ and only small headlines that several thousand people had been massacred in the eastern Congolese town of Bunia.”

The selectivity of U.S. media coverage reflects the political character of “terrorism”— and the slanted angles of customary reportage. It is not the wanton cruelty or the magnitude of murderous actions that excites media condemnation so much as the political context of such actions.

In a May 19 statement, President Bush denounced “killers who can’t stand peace.” He was referring to those who had engaged in deadly attacks that took the lives of Israeli civilians. But the same description could be applied to Israeli government leaders, who often order attacks that predictably take the lives of Palestinian civilians.

Bush has become fond of denouncing “killers” and “terrorists.” He likes to use those words righteously and interchangeably. But they could be applied to him and other top officials in Washington. We may prefer not to think so, but such a harsh assessment would undoubtedly come from thousands of Iraqi people who lost their loved ones this spring.

What we usually fail to notice – and what mainstream media will be the last to tell us – is that news coverage of terrorism is routinely subjective, even arbitrary. Those with the power to use and not use the “terrorism” label in mass media are glad to do so as they please.

In his recent column endeavoring to put post-9/11 media fixations on terrorism in perspective, Dyer wrote: “There are several agendas running in the Bush administration, and the one on top at the moment is the hyper-ambitious Cheney-Rumsfeld project that uses the terrorist threat as a pretext for creating a global ‘pax Americana’ based on the unilateral use of American military power. But the project of the Islamic terrorists is still running too, and this strategy is playing straight into their hands.”

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I would push the analysis a bit further. Both sides are playing into each other's hands, and this is not mere happenstance. The propaganda necessity is to portray one side's killing as righteous and the other's as evil. Right now, it's fair to say, each side is committed to large-scale killing. Yet their lethal capacities are vastly asymmetrical. The Pentagon has the power to dominate the world, while Al Qaeda can only hope to dominate the headlines.

To exploit the evil of Al Qaeda's actions for its own purposes, the Bush team is pleased to fuel and stoke the disproportionate coverage by U.S. media outlets.

JOHN PILGER / MAY 27

Britain supports terrorists

In recent weeks, a number of apparently unrelated news reports have, in sum, told a truth that is never reported. According to Human Rights Watch, thousands of British and American cluster bombs were fired at and dropped on civilian areas in Iraq. British artillery fired more than 2,000 of them at Basra. Each shell scatters bomblets over a wide area, and many fail to explode. Their victims are “not known”, says the Ministry of Defence. They are known. They are often children; Iraq’s population is almost half children.

At the same time, HMS Turbulent, a nuclear-powered submarine, returned to Plymouth flying the Jolly Roger, the pirates’ emblem. This vessel fired 30 American Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iraq, at a cost to the British taxpayer of £21m. What did they hit? How many people did they kill or maim in this nation of sick people and disproportionate numbers of children? The commander would only say that he was “proud to be called forward”.

Readers will remember the patriotic calls to “support the troops” regardless of one’s misgivings about the war. Why a non-conscripted force deserved our “support” in its illegal and craven actions against a weak and stricken nation was never explained by any politician, newspaper or broadcaster.

Very recently, the news was dominated by embarrassing disclosures about the British “secret war” in Ireland. The British “security services” were confirmed as the most important and most ruthless terrorist organisation in Northern Ireland, having funded, trained and protected terrorists on both sides. Their victims included solicitors, pensioners and even their own agents. Like the Blair government’s crimes in Iraq, the revelations now emerging from the murk of Britain’s war in Ireland

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are unlikely to be placed in their proper historical context.

That was certainly true following the 1994 public inquiry into the scandal of illegal British arms sales to Iraq, presided over by Lord Justice Scott. Behind the obfuscations of Scott's summary, the truths he found were explosive. Tim Laxton, an auditor assisting the inquiry and one of the few to hear almost all the evidence, believes that had Scott's terms of reference given him clout, hundreds would have faced criminal investigation. "They would include," he said, "top political figures, very senior civil servants from the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry . . . the top echelon of the British government."

British imperial power has been second to none in covering, even romanticising its crimes, projecting itself as benign and wise, even a gift to humanity. With every generation comes new mythologists. "When a well-packaged web of lies has been sold gradually to the masses over generations," observed the American sage Dresden James, "the truth will seem utterly preposterous and its speaker a raving lunatic." A brilliant, exciting and deeply disturbing book, published this month, unwraps the whole package, layer by layer, piece by piece. This is *Web of Deceit: Britain's real role in the world* by Mark Curtis (Vintage).

Curtis's history could not be more timely, for not in my memory has there been such an expose of private revelations and true intentions, told largely from official files. I know of no other living historian who has mined British foreign policy archives as devastatingly. From Africa to south-east Asia, Chechnya to Iraq, Curtis provides documented evidence of British foreign policy as "one of the leading supporters of terrorism in the world today . . . a simple fact never mentioned in the mainstream political culture". Most of his primary sources have long been in the public domain: a fact that shames silent, mainstream journalism.

It was Mark Curtis who was among the first to reveal the scale of British complicity in the bloodbath that brought General Suharto to power in Indonesia in 1965-66 (and had difficulty getting a newspaper

to publish his findings). He describes a total silence in the 1960s when the Labour government of Harold Wilson supplied warships, logistics and intelligence in support of Suharto. The slaughter of up to a million people was simply ignored in Britain; the headlines said that communism had been defeated in Indonesia and “stability” restored.

What has changed? Not much. At the Labour Party conference in 2001, Tony Blair declared his “moral commitment” to the world. “I tell you,” he said, “if Rwanda happened again today as it did in 1993, when a million people were slaughtered in cold blood, we would have a moral duty to act.” The following day, as Curtis points out, Blair’s statement was reported without a single journalist reminding the British people that their government had contributed to the slaughter in Rwanda.

From official files, Curtis describes how the British government “used its diplomatic weight to reduce severely a UN force that, according to military officers on the ground, could have prevented the killings. It then helped ensure the delay of other plans for intervention, which sent a direct green light to the murderers in Rwanda to continue. Britain also refused to provide the capability for other states to intervene, while blaming the lack of such capability on the UN. Throughout, Britain helped ensure that the UN did not use the word ‘genocide’ so the UN would not act, using diplomatic pressure on others to ensure this did not happen.” Not a word about this appeared in the British media at the time.

A similar silence has shrouded the shocking story of Diego Garcia. Last year, a report in the Washington Post alleged that the United States had “rendered” alleged al-Qaeda prisoners for interrogation (tortured them) at the US base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. This is British territory “leased” by the United States without the agreement of the inhabitants. As Curtis documents, the 1,500 Ilois people were, to use the official term, “removed” from their homeland in the Chagos island group in 1966 by the Wilson government. This ruthless dispossession, secretly executed so that the largest island, Diego

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Garcia, could be handed to the American military, was, as the files show, “the subject of systematic lying by seven British governments over near four decades”. The Ministry of Defence even denied that the island had been populated at all. BBC newsreaders routinely echo this. A high court action giving the people the right of return has been ignored by the Blair government. “Violating international law,” writes Curtis, “has become as British as afternoon tea.”

The final chapter, “The Mass Production of Ignorance”, describes a virulent media censorship by omission that is not conspiratorial, more a celebration of “one key concept: the idea of Britain’s basic benevolence . . . the idea that Britain promotes high principles – democracy, peace, human rights and development– in its foreign policy”.

In other words, the truth is simply left out. This superb book puts it back in.

June

NORMAN SOLOMON / JUNE 8

Trust, war and terrorism

In a democracy, leaders must earn and retain the public's trust. No matter how loudly those leaders proclaim their dedication to fighting terrorism, we must not flinch from examining whether they are trustworthy. On March 17, 2003, in a major address to the American people, President George W. Bush declared: "Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised." On April 10, in a televised message to the people of Iraq, Prime Minister Tony Blair said: "We did not want this war. But in refusing to give up his weapons of mass destruction, Saddam gave us no choice but to act."

Before and during the war on Iraq, we heard many other such statements from top officials in Washington and London. Ostensibly they justified the war.

Among the horrors of that war are weapons known as cluster bombs. I use the present tense because now – months after the Pentagon and the British military dropped thousands of cluster bombs on Iraq – they continue to explode, sometimes in the hands of children who pick them up. At high velocity, those bombs fire shards that slice into human flesh.

We might say that the cluster bombs are terrifying weapons. We might say that they – and the leaders who authorized their use – are still terrorizing people in Iraq.

In the long run, if leaders want to gain and maintain trust, it's helpful for their logic to be reasonably plausible rather than Orwellian. But when there is no single standard that reliably condemns "terrorism," then the word serves as a political football rather than a term to be

used with integrity. Unfortunately, in common usage of the word, it is not the wanton cruelty or the magnitude of murderous actions that determines condemnation, but rather the nationalistic and political contexts of those actions.

It would be bad enough if the leaders of the Washington-London axis of “anti-terrorism” were merely duplicitous in their rationales for going to war. Or it would be bad enough if those leaders were honest about their reasons while ordering their own activities that terrorize civilians. But flagrant dishonesty is integral to broader and deeper problems with basic policies that tacitly distinguish between “worthy” and “unworthy” victims – that encourage us, in effect, to ask for whom the bell tolls. The official guidance needn’t be explicit to be well understood or at least widely internalised: Do not let too much empathy move in unauthorised directions.

For instance: One searches in vain for a record of Washington condemning its ally Turkey while, in recent years, Turkey’s government drove millions of Kurdish people from their homes, destroyed thousands of villages, killed many thousands of Kurds and inflicted horrific torture. To take another example: The war on Iraq has been praised for closing down the regime’s torture chambers. Meanwhile, billions of dollars in aid continue to flow from Washington to the Egyptian government, which operates torture chambers for political prisoners. One might think that an appropriate way to oppose torture would be to stop financing it.

President Bush routinely denounces terrorists who engage in deadly attacks that take the lives of Israeli civilians. But he never applies similar denunciations to the U.S.-backed Israeli government leaders, who often order attacks that predictably take the lives of Palestinian civilians.

Years before the crime against humanity known as 9/11, the scholar Eqbal Ahmed pointed out: “A superpower cannot promote terror in one place and reasonably expect to discourage terrorism in another place. It won’t work in this shrunken world.” To deserve public trust,

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anything called a “war on terrorism” would need to be guided by genuine moral precepts rather than public relations maneuvers to mask ongoing patterns of hypocrisy.

On May 28, a report by Amnesty International condemned the American and British governments for a so-called war on terror that actually emboldens many regimes to engage in terrible abuses of human rights. Amnesty’s Secretary-General Irene Khan said that “what would have been unacceptable on September 10, 2001, is now becoming almost the norm” – while Washington promotes “a new doctrine of human rights a la carte.” She added: “The United States continues to pick and choose which bits of its obligations under international law it will use, and when it will use them.”

Worldwide, it will be impossible to sustain public trust in anti-terrorist efforts without adhering to standards that consistently reject terrorism. Launching aggressive wars and providing massive support to abusers of human rights are themselves acts of terrorism – by the strong. They are sure to heighten rage and provoke acts of terrorism by the weak.

When a country – particularly a democracy – goes to war, the consent of the governed lubricates the machinery of killing. Silence is a key form of co-operation, but the war-making system does not insist on quietude or agreement. Mere passivity or self-restraint will suffice.

The world is now shadowed by a special relationship between two governments – the superpower and its leading enabler. In the name of moral leadership, they utilize deception. In the name of peace, they inflict war. In the name of fighting terrorism, they engage in terrorism. Such policies demand trust but deserve unyielding opposition.

This is an excerpt from presentation made by Norman Solomon on June 5, 2003, to the “Communicating the War on Terror” conference in London at the Royal Institution of Great Britain

GEORGE MONBIOT / JUNE 10

Let's do a Monsanto

Something about the launch of the government's "great GM debate" last week rang a bell. It was, perhaps, the contrast between the ambition of its stated aims and the feebleness of their execution. Though the environment secretary, Margaret Beckett, claims she wants "to ensure all voices are heard", she has set aside an advertising budget of precisely zero. Public discussions will take place in just six towns.

Then I got it. Five years ago, Monsanto, the world's most controversial biotechnology company, did the same thing. In June 1998, after its attempts to persuade consumers that they wanted to eat genetically modified food had failed, it launched what it called a public debate "to encourage a positive understanding of food biotechnology". As the company's GM investments were then valued at \$96bn (£60bn), the proposition that it might desist if the response was unfavourable seemed unlikely.

To Monsanto's horror, it got the debate it said it wanted. A few days after it launched its new policy, Prince Charles wrote an article for the Telegraph. His argument, as always, was cack-handed and contradictory, but it shoved genetic engineering to the top of the news agenda. Monsanto's share value slumped. Within two years it had been taken over by Pharmacia, a company it once dwarfed.

Like Monsanto, the British government has already invested in genetic engineering. In 1999, it allocated £13m (or 26 times what it is spending on the great debate) "to improve the profile of the biotech industry", by promoting "the financial and environmental benefits of biotechnology". This, and its appointment of major biotech investors to head several research committees and a government department,

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ensured that it lost the confidence of the public. So, like Monsanto, it now seeks to revive that confidence, by claiming - rather too late - that it is open to persuasion. Again, the decision to introduce the crops to Britain appears to have been made long before the debate began.

Last year, an unnamed minister told the Financial Times that the debate was simply a “PR offensive”. “They’re calling it a consultation,” he said, “but don’t be in any doubt, the decision is already taken.” In March, Margaret Beckett began the licensing process for 18 applications to grow or import commercial quantities of GM crops in Britain. Her action pre-empts the debate, pre-empts the field trials designed to determine whether or not the crops are safe to grow here, and pre-empts the only real decisions which count: namely those made by the EU and the World Trade Organisation. The WTO must now respond to an official US complaint about Europe’s refusal to buy GM food. If the US wins, we must either pay hundreds of millions of dollars of annual compensation, or permit GM crops to be grown and marketed here.

Why should this prospect concern us? I might have hoped that, five years after the first, real debate began in Britain, it would not be necessary to answer that question. But so much misinformation has been published over the past few weeks that it seems I may have to start from the beginning.

The principal issue, perpetually and deliberately ignored by government, many scientists, most of the media and, needless to say, the questionnaire being used to test public opinion, is the corporate takeover of the food chain. By patenting transferred genes and the technology associated with them, then buying up the competing seed merchants and seed-breeding centres, the biotech companies can exert control over the crops at every stage of production and sale. Farmers are reduced to their sub-contracted agents. This has devastating implications for food security in the poor world: food is removed from local marketing networks - and therefore the mouths of local people - and gravitates instead towards sources of hard currency. This problem is

compounded by the fact that (and this is another perpetually neglected issue) most of the acreage of GM crops is devoted to producing not food for humans, but feed for animals.

The second issue is environmental damage. Many of the crops have been engineered to withstand applications of weedkiller. This permits farmers to wipe out almost every competing species of plant in their fields. The exceptions are the weeds which, as a result of GM pollen contamination, have acquired multiple herbicide resistance. In Canada, for example, some oilseed rape is now resistant to all three of the most widely used modern pesticides. The result is that farmers trying to grow other crops must now spray it with 2,4-D, a poison which persists in the environment.

The third issue, greatly over-emphasised by the press, is human health. There is, as yet, no evidence of adverse health effects caused directly by GM crops. This could be because there are no effects, or it could be because the necessary clinical trials and epidemiological studies, have, extraordinarily, still to be conducted.

There is, however, some evidence of possible indirect effects. In 1997 the Conservative government quietly raised the permitted levels of glyphosate in soya beans destined for human consumption by 20,000%. Glyphosate is the active ingredient of Roundup, the pesticide which Monsanto's soya beans have been engineered to resist. "Roundup Ready" GM crops, because they are sprayed directly with the herbicide, are likely to contain far higher levels of glyphosate than conventional ones. In 1999, the Journal of the American Cancer Society reported that exposure to glyphosate led to increased risks of contracting a type of cancer called non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

The defenders of GM crops say we can avoid all such hazards by choosing not to eat them. The problem is that we can avoid them only if we know whether or not the food we eat contains them. The US appears determined to attack the strict labelling requirements for which the European parliament has now voted. If it succeeds in persuading the WTO that accurate labelling is an unfair restriction, then

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the only means we have of avoiding GM is to eat organic, whose certification boards ensure that it is GM-free. But as pollen from GM crops contaminates organic crops, the distinction will eventually become impossible to sustain. While banning GM products might at first appear to be a restriction of consumer choice (someone, somewhere, might want to eat one), not banning them turns out to be a far greater intrusion upon our liberties.

The only chance we have of keeping them out of Europe is to ensure that the political cost becomes greater than the economic cost: to demand, in other words, that our governments fight the US through the WTO and, if they lose, pay compensation rather than permit them to be planted. So let us join this debate, and see how much the government likes it when “all voices are heard”. Like Monsanto, it may come to wish it had never asked.

JOHN PILGER / JUNE 23

Bush's Vietnam

America's two "great victories" since 11 September 2001 are unravelling. In Afghanistan, the regime of Hamid Karzai has virtually no authority and no money, and would collapse without American guns. Al-Qaeda has not been defeated, and the Taliban are re-emerging. Regardless of showcase improvements, the situation of women and children remains desperate. The token woman in Karzai's cabinet, the courageous physician Sima Samar, has been forced out of government and is now in constant fear of her life, with an armed guard outside her office door and another at her gate. Murder, rape and child abuse are committed with impunity by the private armies of America's "friends", the warlords whom Washington has bribed with millions of dollars, cash in hand, to give the pretence of stability.

"We are in a combat zone the moment we leave this base," an American colonel told me at Bagram airbase, near Kabul. "We are shot at every day, several times a day." When I said that surely he had come to liberate and protect the people, he belly-laughed.

American troops are rarely seen in Afghanistan's towns. They escort US officials at high speed in armoured vans with blackened windows and military vehicles, mounted with machine-guns, in front and behind. Even the vast Bagram base was considered too insecure for the defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, during his recent, fleeting visit. So nervous are the Americans that a few weeks ago they "accidentally" shot dead four government soldiers in the centre of Kabul, igniting the second major street protest against their presence in a week.

On the day I left Kabul, a car bomb exploded on the road to the airport, killing four German soldiers, members of the international security force Isaf. The Germans' bus was lifted into the air; human flesh lay on the roadside. When British soldiers arrived to "seal off" the area,

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they were watched by a silent crowd, squinting into the heat and dust, across a divide as wide as that which separated British troops from Afghans in the 19th century, and the French from Algerians and Americans from Vietnamese.

In Iraq, scene of the second “great victory”, there are two open secrets. The first is that the “terrorists” now besieging the American occupation force represent an armed resistance that is almost certainly supported by the majority of Iraqis who, contrary to pre-war propaganda, opposed their enforced “liberation” (see Jonathan Steele’s investigation, 19 March 2003, www.guardian.co.uk). The second secret is that there is emerging evidence of the true scale of the Anglo-American killing, pointing to the bloodbath Bush and Blair have always denied.

Comparisons with Vietnam have been made so often over the years that I hesitate to draw another. However, the similarities are striking: for example, the return of expressions such as “sucked into a quagmire”. This suggests, once again, that the Americans are victims, not invaders: the approved Hollywood version when a rapacious adventure goes wrong. Since Saddam Hussein’s statue was toppled almost three months ago, more Americans have been killed than during the war. Ten have been killed and 25 wounded in classic guerrilla attacks on roadblocks and checkpoints which may number as many as a dozen a day.

The Americans call the guerrillas “Saddam loyalists” and “Ba’athist fighters”, in the same way they used to dismiss the Vietnamese as “communists”. Recently, in Falluja, in the Sunni heartland of Iraq, it was clearly not the presence of Ba’athists or Saddamists, but the brutal behaviour of the occupiers, who fired point-blank at a crowd, that inspired the resistance. The American tanks gunning down a family of shepherds is reminiscent of the gunning down of a shepherd, his family and sheep by “coalition” aircraft in a “no-fly zone” four years ago, whose aftermath I filmed and which evoked, for me, the murderous games American aircraft used to play in Vietnam, gunning down farmers in their fields, children on their buffaloes.

On 12 June, a large American force attacked a “terrorist base” north

of Baghdad and left more than 100 dead, according to a US spokesman. The term “terrorist” is important, because it implies that the likes of al-Qaeda are attacking the liberators, and so the connection between Iraq and 11 September is made, which in pre-war propaganda was never made.

More than 400 prisoners were taken in this operation. The majority have reportedly joined thousands of Iraqis in a “holding facility” at Baghdad airport: a concentration camp along the lines of Bagram, from where people are shipped to Guantanamo Bay. In Afghanistan, the Americans pick up taxi drivers and send them into oblivion, via Bagram. Like Pinochet’s boys in Chile, they are making their perceived enemies “disappear”.

“Search and destroy”, the scorched-earth tactic from Vietnam, is back. In the arid south-eastern plains of Afghanistan, the village of Niazi Qala no longer stands. American airborne troops swept down before dawn on 30 December 2001 and slaughtered, among others, a wedding party. Villagers said that women and children ran towards a dried pond, seeking protection from the gunfire, and were shot as they ran. After two hours, the aircraft and the attackers left. According to a United Nations investigation, 52 people were killed, including 25 children. “We identified it as a military target,” says the Pentagon, echoing its initial response to the My Lai massacre 35 years ago.

The targeting of civilians has long been a journalistic taboo in the west. Accredited monsters did that, never “us”. The civilian death toll of the 1991 Gulf war was wildly underestimated. Almost a year later, a comprehensive study by the Medical Education Trust in London estimated that more than 200,000 Iraqis had died during and immediately after the war, as a direct or indirect consequence of attacks on civilian infrastructure. The report was all but ignored. This month, Iraq Body Count, a group of American and British academics and researchers, estimated that up to 10,000 civilians may have been killed in Iraq, including 2,356 civilians in the attack on Baghdad alone. And this is likely to be an extremely conservative figure.

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In Afghanistan, there has been similar carnage. In May last year, Jonathan Steele extrapolated all the available field evidence of the human cost of the US bombing and concluded that as many as 20,000 Afghans may have lost their lives as an indirect consequence of the bombing, many of them drought victims denied relief.

This “hidden” effect is hardly new. A recent study at Columbia University in New York has found that the spraying of Agent Orange and other herbicides on Vietnam was up to four times as great as previously estimated. Agent Orange contained dioxin, one of the deadliest poisons known. In what they first called Operation Hades, then changed to the friendlier Operation Ranch Hand, the Americans in Vietnam destroyed, in some 10,000 “missions” to spray Agent Orange, almost half the forests of southern Vietnam, and countless human lives. It was the most insidious and perhaps the most devastating use of a chemical weapon of mass destruction ever. Today, Vietnamese children continue to be born with a range of deformities, or they are still-born, or the foetuses are aborted.

The use of uranium-tipped munitions evokes the catastrophe of Agent Orange. In the first Gulf war in 1991, the Americans and British used 350 tonnes of depleted uranium. According to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, quoting an international study, 50 tonnes of DU, if inhaled or ingested, would cause 500,000 deaths. Most of the victims are civilians in southern Iraq. It is estimated that 2,000 tonnes were used during the latest attack.

In a remarkable series of reports for the Christian Science Monitor, the investigative reporter Scott Peterson has described radiated bullets in the streets of Baghdad and radiation-contaminated tanks, where children play without warning. Belatedly, a few signs in Arabic have appeared: “Danger - Get away from this area”. At the same time, in Afghanistan, the Uranium Medical Research Centre, based in Canada, has made two field studies, with the results described as “shocking”. “Without exception,” it reported, “at every bomb site investigated, people are ill. A significant portion of the civilian population presents

symptoms consistent with internal contamination by uranium.”

An official map distributed to non-government agencies in Iraq shows that the American and British military have plastered urban areas with cluster bombs, many of which will have failed to detonate on impact. These usually lie unnoticed until children pick them up, then they explode.

In the centre of Kabul, I found two ragged notices warning people that the rubble of their homes, and streets, contained unexploded cluster bombs “made in USA”. Who reads them? Small children? The day I watched children skipping through what might have been an urban minefield, I saw Tony Blair on CNN in the lobby of my hotel. He was in Iraq, in Basra, lifting a child into his arms, in a school that had been painted for his visit, and where lunch had been prepared in his honour, in a city where basic services such as education, food and water remain a shambles under the British occupation.

It was in Basra three years ago that I filmed hundreds of children ill and dying because they had been denied cancer treatment equipment and drugs under an embargo enforced with enthusiasm by Tony Blair. Now here he was - shirt open, with that fixed grin, a man of the troops if not of the people - lifting a toddler into his arms for the cameras.

When I returned to London, I read “After Lunch”, by Harold Pinter, from a new collection of his called *War* (Faber & Faber):

*And after noon the well-dressed creatures come
To sniff among the dead
And have their lunch*

*And all the many well-dressed creatures pluck
The swollen avocados from the dust
And stir the minestrone with stray bones*

*And after lunch
They loll and lounge about
Decanting claret in convenient skulls*

July

JOHN PILGER / JULY 4

Lies, distortions and arms sales

Unless we apply the lesson “all governments are liars” to our own leaders, British fighter jets and chemical weapons technology will continue to wreck lives all over the world. The conscious nature of Tony Blair’s lies and distortions over Iraq is now clear. Collectors will have their favourites. Mine is his statement in parliament on 29 January that “we do know of links between al-Qaeda and Iraq”. As the intelligence agencies have repeatedly confirmed, there were no links, and Blair would have known this. Looking back, this lie sought to justify his statement, in October 2001, that there would be “a wider war” against Iraq only if there was “absolute evidence” of its complicity in 11 September. Of course, there was no evidence, and Blair must have known that, too.

On 12 March, he told parliament that France “is saying, whatever the circumstances, it will veto a resolution” to invade Iraq. Two days earlier, President Jacques Chirac had said the very opposite: that if Iraq failed to co-operate with the UN inspectors, “it will be for the Security Council and it alone to decide the right thing [and] war would become inevitable”. It was this deception that disillusioned even Clare Short.

Blair’s festival of lies has shocked some people: those who still believe that their elected representatives tell the truth. Perhaps they are prepared to tolerate some “fudge”, but not deliberate lies, especially those, such as Blair’s, that lead to the criminal killing of thousands of people.

Is he unusual? The great American muckraker I F Stone said: “All governments are liars and nothing they say should be believed.” To which the great Irish muckraker Claud Cockburn added: “Never

believe anything until it is officially denied.”

They were referring to governments that could not be called to account for their actions, regardless of their democratic gloss. The Blair government exemplifies this corruption, which is the “democratic totalitarianism” that Orwell described. It has many institutional forms; the most enduring is the Foreign Office where, as the Scott inquiry into the arms-to-Iraq scandal was told, there is “a culture of lying”.

For almost 20 years, the Foreign Office denied that the Suharto regime in Indonesia was using British-supplied Hawk fighter-bombers (and armoured cars and machine-guns) against defenceless people in illegally occupied East Timor, where a third of the population was wiped out by the Indonesian occupation. These lies were faithfully echoed by journalists. I remember the BBC’s Jeremy Paxman saying that even if Blair’s new “ethical” foreign policy had stopped the sale of Hawk aircraft, the presence of the aircraft in East Timor was “not proved”, which was precisely the line.

The truth was the opposite; the use of Hawks in East Timor had been proved, over and again, and the Foreign Office knew this, as Robin Cook was forced to admit in 1999 when a Hawk flew low over the East Timorese capital in full view of the foreign media.

Most of the lying is conducted at a routine “low level”, in letters signed by officials and junior ministers. I have filled half a filing cabinet with them.

A recent example: two New Statesman readers wrote to their MP following a reference of mine in January to Britain selling chemical weapons to Israel. Nigel Griffiths, minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, replied that the allegation was “entirely without foundation” and claimed that Britain had destroyed all its chemical weapons.

What he omitted to say was that chemical weapons technology and capability are still being manufactured in Britain and sold to some 26 countries, including Israel. These are toxic chemical precursors, or TCPs, the sale of which is banned under the Chemical Weapons Convention. British sales of TCPs are recorded in the government’s

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Strategic Export Control Annual Report, which is a model of obscurantism. In effect, it hides them and other banned or borderline weapons technology.

This was revealed a year ago in the Glasgow Sunday Herald by the investigative journalist Neil Mackay (“Britain’s chemical bazaar”, 9 June 2002). The DTI had admitted to Mackay that the sales of TCPs had been authorised by the government, even though it was not known what they would be used for. As Mackay pointed out, the Chemical Weapons Convention says the export of TCPs can go ahead only when it is clear that their ultimate use is not prohibited under the convention. In other words, the British government can license TCPs only when it is 100 per cent certain that they will not be weaponised. In any case, Griffiths’s officials told Mackay that promises about them being for use in agriculture could easily be broken. “It is impossible to know what happens to them in the stages that come after they leave Britain,” said one official.

Professor Julian Perry Robinson of the Science and Technology Policy Research Unit at Sussex University, an expert on the Chemical Weapons Convention, said a TCP such as dimethyl methylphosphonate could easily be turned into sarin nerve gas. Sarin was the agent used in the 1995 attack on the Tokyo Underground, which killed 12 people. “Every single chemical warfare agent can be made from toxic chemical precursors,” he said.

The Blair government has approved the sale of these toxic precursors to regimes that have not even signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, such as Israel, Libya, Taiwan and Syria. Moreover, it has carried on this trade while Blair has lied about the “threat” of Iraq’s chemical weapons.

This is hardly surprising. Under Blair, Britain has reclaimed its place as the world’s second biggest weapons dealer. Britain sells to 50 countries engaged in conflict, including both sides in the India/Pakistan conflict. Last year, when Blair was in the subcontinent playing “peacemaker”, he was secretly tying up a deal with India for the same Hawk

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fighters that devastated East Timor. He has backed Britain's biggest ever and most corrupt arms deal – with the unstable and repressive dictatorship in Saudi Arabia, a birthplace of al-Qaeda.

Lying about these matters, about war and peace, is not new. Addressing the French public in 1767, Voltaire wrote: “Anyone who has the power to make you believe absurdities has the power to make you commit injustices.” It is time we denied them that power.

GEORGE MONBIOT / JULY 8

Our fake patriots

The prediction was not hard to make. If Britain kept supporting the US government as it trampled the sovereignty of other nations, before long it would come to threaten our own. But few guessed that this would happen so soon. Long ago, Britain informally surrendered much of its determination of foreign policy to the United States. We have sent our soldiers to die for that country in two recent wars, and our politicians to lie for it. But now the British government is going much further. It is ceding control to the US over two of the principal instruments of national self-determination: judicial authority and military policy.

The mystery is not that this is happening. The mystery is that those who have sought to persuade us that they are the guardians of national sovereignty are either failing to respond or demanding only that Britain becomes the doormat on which the US government can wipe its bloodstained boots.

A month ago we discovered that our home secretary had secretly concluded an extradition treaty with the US that permits the superpower to extract British nationals without presenting evidence before a court. Britain acquires no such rights in the US. The response from the rightwing press was a thunderous silence. Last week, we learnt that two British citizens held in the prison camp in Guantanamo Bay will be denied a fair trial, that they may stay in prison even if they are found innocent, and that they will not be returned to Britain to serve their sentences. There were a couple of muted squeaks in the patriotic papers, offset by an article in the Sunday Telegraph which sought to justify the US action on the grounds that one of the men had been arrested before. The story was spoilt somewhat by the fact that he had been released without charge.

But by far the most significant event passed without comment. Two

weeks ago, the defence secretary, Geoff Hoon, told the Royal United Services Institute that he intends to restructure the British armed forces. As “it is highly unlikely that the United Kingdom would be engaged in large-scale combat operations without the United States”, the armed forces must now be “structured and equipped” to meet the demands of the wars fought by our ally. Our military, in other words, will become functionally subordinate to that of another nation. The only published response from the right that I can find came from Bernard Jenkin, the Conservative defence spokesman. “The real question he must answer,” Jenkin rumbled, “is how he can deliver more with underlying defence spending running behind the total inherited from the previous Conservative government.” For the party of national sovereignty, there is no question of whether; simply of how.

Let us imagine for a moment the response of the patriots, had these assaults on our independence been attempted by or on behalf of the European Union. No, let’s not imagine it, let’s read it. In April, the Daily Telegraph pointed out that a few hundred men under the command of the EU had been deployed in Macedonia. This, it feared, could represent the beginning of a European army. Blair, it demanded, “must logically reject the plans for both political and military union”. The Sun was terser. “The new army will need a flag,” it said. “How about a white one?” But when Hoon raises the white flag and hands over not a distant possibility of cooperation, but our entire armed forces to another country, the patriots are silent. Why is it that the right has chosen to blind itself to what is happening? And what does it take to persuade it that the greatest threat to national sovereignty in Britain is not the European Union, but the United States?

The double standards are baffling. A few months ago, Paul Johnson, ancient custodian of our independence, wrote in the Spectator that the world “needs hero states, to look up to, to appeal to, to encourage and to follow”. A sole superpower, he argued, “is a much safer and more responsible step towards world order than a corrupt pandemonium like the UN or a rapacious and blind bureaucracy like the EU.” It is bet-

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ter, in other words, to humbly obey another country than to participate, with negotiating rights and voting powers, in a system of regional or global governance. This notion reflects the creed of the Tory party, some of whose members have been flirting with the idea of leaving the EU and joining the Free Trade Area of the Americas. The difference between the two, of course, is that if we joined the FTAA we would have to accept the outcome of negotiations in which we took no part.

It is the conceit of rightwing commentators that those who contest the surrender of British sovereignty to the US do so not because they are concerned about national self-determination, but because they hate the Americans. Their hypocrisy is breathtaking. On February 4, Michael Gove, in the Times, wrote an article headlined “The ‘68 reasons why Germany will always fail: Gerhard Schröder’s nation has not enjoyed a single success in 10 years”, in which he raved about “a historic weakness in the German character” and the “anti-liberal” urge of the German people to follow “a special path, a Sonderweg”. Three weeks later he wrote another piece, headlined “Stop the war! Give up bashing the Yanks”, in which he claimed that “In defining whether Britain is, or should be, closer in sympathy to the US than the continent, a host of prejudices is unleashed.”

So why is it deemed by the right to be patriotic both to oppose the EU and to appease the US? Why has the old reactionary motto “my country, right or wrong” been so smoothly replaced with another one: “their country, right or wrong”? Why does the British right now believe it has a God-given duty to defend someone else’s empire?

I think the first thing we must recognise is that the “patriotism” that informs the attacks on the EU is fake. The newspapers that are responsible for most of the hysteria about straight bananas and regulated sausages are owned and run by a Canadian (Conrad Black) and an Australian with American citizenship (Rupert Murdoch). These men seem to care nothing for the “British values” their papers claim to defend. Their conglomerates are based in North America, and they have much less of a presence in continental Europe. They would

appear, therefore, to possess a powerful incentive for dragging Britain away from the EU, and handing it, alive and kicking, to the US.

American empire, unlike European convergence, is also unequivocally a project of the right; it establishes the political and economic space in which men like Murdoch and Black can work without impediment. But perhaps most importantly, our fake patriots know where real power lies. Having located it, they wish to appease it. For the very reason that the United States is a greater threat to our sovereignty than the European Union, they will not stand up to it.

NORMAN SOLOMON / JULY 16

Bush's war boosters: No time to voice regrets

The superstar columnist George Will has an impressive vocabulary. Too bad it doesn't include the words "I'm sorry." Ten months ago, Will led the media charge when a member of Congress dared to say that President Bush would try to deceive the public about Iraq. By now, of course, strong evidence has piled up that Bush tried and succeeded.

But back in late September, when a media frenzy erupted about Rep. Jim McDermott's live appearance from Baghdad on ABC's "This Week" program, what riled the punditocracy as much as anything else was McDermott's last statement during the interview: "I think the president would mislead the American people."

First to wave a media dagger at the miscreant was Will, a regular on the ABC television show. Within minutes, on the air, he denounced "the most disgraceful performance abroad by an American official in my lifetime." But the syndicated columnist was just getting started.

Back at his computer, George Will churned out a piece that appeared in *The Washington Post* two days later, ripping into McDermott and a colleague on the trip, Rep. David Bonior. "Saddam Hussein finds American collaborators among senior congressional Democrats," Will wrote.

There was special venom for McDermott in the column. Will could not abide the spectacle of a Congressperson casting doubt on George W. Bush's utter veracity. "McDermott's accusation that the president – presumably with Cheney, Powell, Rumsfeld, Rice and others as accomplices – would use deceit to satisfy his craving to send young Americans into an unnecessary war is a slander."

During early October, the national media echo chamber kept rock-

ing with countless reprises of Will's bugle call. One of the main reasons for the furor was widespread media denial that "the president would mislead the American people."

An editorial in the Rocky Mountain News fumed that "some of McDermott's words, delivered via TV, were nothing short of outrageous." In Georgia, the Augusta Chronicle declared: "For a U.S. congressman to virtually accuse the president of lying while standing on foreign soil – especially the soil of a nation that seeks to destroy his nation and even tried to assassinate a former U.S. president – is an appallingly unpatriotic act."

Nationally, on the Fox News Channel, the one-man bombast factory Bill O'Reilly accused McDermott of "giving aid and comfort to Saddam while he was in Baghdad." O'Reilly said that thousands of his viewers "want to know why McDermott would give propaganda material to a killer and accuse President Bush of being a liar in the capital city of the enemy."

A syndicated column by hyper-moralist Cal Thomas followed with similar indignation: "We have seen Reps. Jim McDermott of Washington and David Bonior of Michigan – the Bozos of Baghdad – accuse President Bush of lying for political gain about Iraq's threat to civilization."

But such attacks did not come only from right-wing media stalwarts. Plenty of middle-road journalists were happy to go the way of the blowing wind.

During one of her routine appearances on Fox television, National Public Radio political correspondent Mara Liasson commented on McDermott and Bonior: "These guys are a disgrace. Look, everybody knows it's 101, politics 101, that you don't go to an adversary country, an enemy country, and badmouth the United States, its policies and the president of the United States. I mean, these guys ought to, I don't know, resign."

Now that it's evident the president of the United States not only "would" mislead the American people but actually did – with the

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result of a horrendous war – it’s time to ask when such pundits, who went after McDermott with a vengeance last fall, might publicly concede that he made a valid and crucial point.

To use George Will’s inadvertently apt words, it was prescient to foresee that “the president – presumably with Cheney, Powell, Rumsfeld, Rice and others as accomplices – would use deceit to satisfy his craving to send young Americans into an unnecessary war.”

Much more importantly, if a mainstream political journalist like Mara Liasson was so quick to suggest 10 months ago that McDermott resign for inopportunistically seeking to prevent a war, when will she advocate that the president resign for dishonestly promoting a war – or, failing resignation, face impeachment?

MICHAEL I. NIMAN / JULY 31

Poison and profit in Gulf War II

The Bush presidency has certainly created some strange bed-fellows. Take the peace movement – American peaceniks today are just as likely to gather and listen to right wing warriors as they are to swoon before the call of hairy pacifists. I remember seeing former US Marine Intelligence Officer and UN Weapons Inspector Scott Ritter speak last fall at a Syracuse University event promoted by various Central New York peace groups. Speaking to a crowd that included a nationally known draft resister and a host of other activists, Ritter described himself as a Republican who voted for George W. Bush for president. “I’m a warrior,” he went on to tell the crowd, explaining how he was willing to lay down his life in battle for his country.

Last week I went to see another warrior. This time it was Major Douglas Rokke, speaking in Buffalo at an event sponsored by the Western New York Peace Center. If Ritter’s easy talk about his willingness to kill in battle was chilling, Rokke was the ice man, repeating his “I am a warrior” mantra throughout his two hour presentation as he reminded his listeners that he has killed before and is willing to kill again.

This strange marriage of warriors and peaceniks stems from Rokke and Ritter’s love of country and their deep devotion to their fellow soldiers – who they see as being needlessly put in harms way to satisfy a political and commercial agenda as the nation’s foreign policy is hijacked by the same president that at least one of them voted for. To save their comrades from the horrific weapons of an unnecessary war, they turned to the people who oppose all wars – and a new movement is born.

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Last fall Ritter warned that the impending war wasn't about weapons of mass destruction at all. "Don't insult my colleagues," he said, as he explained how his team found no evidence of any such weapons still in existence. The war, he explained, was about "imperialism," plain and simple. And he didn't want his fellow Marines, soldiers who signed up in good faith to defend their country, to be sent off to fight, kill and die in a war for empire based on lies that Ritter found himself conscience-bound to repudiate.

Time has since proven Ritter right. The US went to war. At last count, approximately 6,500 Iraqi civilians and at least 154 American troops were killed. George Bush started the war based on intelligence information confirming an Iraqi nuclear weapons program that Ritter claimed didn't exist. We now know that Ritter, the weapons inspector, was right. And according to information recently released by the CIA, George Bush knew it too, but went on to lie to the US Congress and the World's citizens – justifying the current war with a foundation of fiction. This in a country where the congress voted to impeach the previous president for lying about a blowjob.

While Ritter tours the country talking about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, or the lack thereof, Rokke has a different specialty. He is a former US Army Depleted Uranium (DU) Project Director. He talks about American weapons of mass destruction. Rokke, a former science teacher and college professor, was called in by the Army at the end of the first Gulf War to assess DU contamination and dangers to troops, and to recover and clean DU contaminated equipment. Assigning this task to him, Rokke now explains, was the Army's biggest mistake. That's because, he argues, the Army is actually more interested in covering up the dangers and liabilities posed by radioactive DU weapons, than it is in protecting US troops and taking responsibility for environmental devastation caused by DU weaponry.

Rokke explains that each DU shell fired from an Abrams tank contains ten pounds of radioactive Uranium 238 – a toxic byproduct of nuclear fuel and weapons enrichment programs. By converting DU

wastes into DU weapons, the military is taking a liability (impossible-to-dispose-of radioactive wastes) and converting it into an asset (the world's most powerful anti-tank projectile weapon). The problem with this plan is the fact that DU remains radioactive for four and a half billion years. It also contains traces of other radioactive compounds such as Plutonium, the most toxic substance on earth, named for Pluto, the Roman god of the dead and ruler of the underworld.

When these rounds hit their target, according to Rokke, 40% of their mass is instantly converted into dust, with particles measuring as small as one micron. DU rounds fired from airborne weapons, he went on to explain, weigh 300 grams. With guns firing 4,000 rounds per minute, they are capable of dispersing one ton of DU per minute into the environment.

According to Rokke, the military began using DU weapons in the first Gulf War despite the fact that they did not, and still do not, have any plan for cleaning up DU contaminated environments. Despite this, they used over 370 tons of DU in the first Gulf War, contaminating large sections of Kuwait and Southern Iraq. The London Guardian reports that 1,000 to 2,000 tons of DU weapons have been used so far in the second Gulf War. Still, according to a study issued at the end of May by the media watchdog group, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, the words "depleted uranium" were never uttered this year on ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News or NBC Nightly News.

The results of DU weapons deployment, though unreported in this country, have been devastating. In 1988, Basra's hospital saw 34 cancer deaths. By 1998 that number increased to 428 deaths, with one or two deformed babies born per day. Since the first Gulf War, the US has also used DU weapons in Kosovo, Serbia, Afghanistan and in training exercises in Vieques, Puerto Rico, off the coast of Seattle, and in Australia. All of this deployment is in violation of UN weapons conventions since the UN has determined that DU kills indiscriminately and is, therefore, illegal.

It's this indiscriminant killing that has Rokke traveling the world

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speaking out, at his own peril, against the policies of his own army (Rokke is still a Major in the Reserves). He sees DU contamination of the battlefield as the key component in a toxic stew that is slowly disabling and killing personnel who served in the first Gulf war. There, he argues, soldiers were given six to eight immunization shots all at once, throwing their immune systems off balance. He claims that contrary to standard procedures, military kept few if any records of the immunizations. He also claims personnel were exposed to unknown pesticides which were applied irresponsibly. Add smoke from oil fires and DU dust, and you have a “toxic mess.” It’s these simultaneous attacks from multiple poisons, Rokke believes, that cause a multiple chemical sensitivity and ultimately, Gulf War Syndrome.

Despite the fact that the military had numerous reports detailing DU dangers, they never warned troops in either Gulf War about the weaponry that they were handling. Hence, soldiers would explore the radioactive ruins of Iraqi tanks, pocket contaminated war trophies, and, according to reports, camp for months at a time on ground contaminated by DU dust particles.

Hence, it should come as no surprise that according to the US Department of Veterans’ Affairs, approximately 221,000 Gulf war veterans have permanent war related disabilities, with another 10,000 or so veterans now dead from war related syndromes. With 696,628 people serving in the first Gulf War, these casualty numbers represent a casualty rate of nearly one in three. Add to these figures the numbers of veterans whose disability claims have been turned down, and the rate rises to nearly one in two. By comparison, the casualty rate for injuries and death in World Wars I and II, as well as the Vietnam War, was one in fifteen.

This is why warriors like Ritter and Rokke are coming forward to seek help from the peace movement. It’s because their former comrades in arms are needlessly dying at the hands of a military machine that callously poisons them, and a government that needlessly sends them off to avoidable wars. Ritter and Rokke are supporting the troops. And

they're asking other Americans to join them. This is true patriotism and true support for America's fighting men and women.

Many of these servicepersons enlisted for idealistic reasons – to defend the nation while fighting for liberty and democracy. Even more, however, signed up for economic reasons. Like Jessica Lynch, they hail from economically distressed communities. Like Jessica Lynch, they couldn't afford the college education that they wanted. In essence, they were caught up in an economic draft, hoping for job training or education benefits. Others just signed up since this was the only job available. Hence, it shouldn't come as a surprise that between 90 and 95% of the military hail from poor and working class backgrounds. And like Jessica Lynch, the vast majority of them opted for non-combat support positions, far from the front lines. With a DU contaminated battlefield, however, the front lines are now everywhere. Veterans advocates claim that during the first Gulf War, approximately 436,000 troops entered radioactive DU contaminated areas.

The Bush forces, comprised almost exclusively of “chickenhawks” – people who advocate war while having evaded military service themselves – hide behind a banner of “supporting our troops.” They wrap themselves in our flag and deride the Ritters and Rokkes of this nation as being unpatriotic while they slash veterans benefits and extend hellacious tours of duty for morale-drained combatants. They order the poisoning of large chunks of the world, then order American troops into the contaminated areas, in effect creating the largest friendly fire incidents in military history. But worst of all, they claim to support our troops as they, in reality, march them off to slow deaths. And they do all this, sending the children of the patriotic poor off to die, while themselves becoming rich from war.

Vice President Dick Cheney typifies the worst of the Bush administration. He supported the Vietnam war, yet avoided serving in the military himself, telling one reporter that he “had other priorities in the Sixties than military service.” Cheney, the former Secretary of Defense in the first Bush administration, left government service to become the

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CEO of the nation's 73rd largest defense contractor and oil industry services company, Halliburton. With Cheney's contacts, Halliburton quickly rose to become the nation's 18th largest military contractor. Dollars and Sense magazine reports that from 1999 to 2002, Halliburton contributed \$700,000 to political fundraisers, with 95% going to Republican causes. Hence it should come as no surprise that the Bush administration just awarded a Halliburton subsidiary a no bid contract to rebuild Iraqi infrastructure with a "cost plus" contract guaranteeing profits to be paid above fluid costs. Hence, Halliburton will rebuild facilities that they initially built for Saddam Hussein after the first Gulf War, which were bombed during the second Gulf War. This contract was awarded despite the fact that Halliburton was just fined \$2million by the SEC for bribing Nigerian officials in a tax avoidance scam. Under Cheney's leadership, the company avoided paying almost \$400 million in US taxes by creating offshore subsidiaries. Cheney currently still receives deferred compensation of up to \$1million per year from Halliburton.

Bechtel is another winner, with a new Iraq contract that could be worth over a half billion dollars. Former Reagan Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, as well as former CIA Director William Casey, were both former Bechtel executives. Current executives include former Reagan Secretary of State George Shultz, who wrote a slew of articles last winter calling for the US to attack Iraq. And of course Bechtel is a big campaign contributor, showering both Republicans and conservative hawkish Democrats with cash.

Campaign contributions are the name of the game for military contractors who live large off the government teat. According to a recent report by Dollars and Sense, Northrop Grumman spent nearly \$30 million on lobbying and campaign contributions from 2000 through 2002. In return, they received over \$24 billion in Department of Defense contracts over the same time period (just a reminder – a billion is a thousand million). Lockheed Martin spent \$26 million courting warmongering politicians during this two year period, netting over \$47 billion in

defense contracts in return. Boeing spent \$26 million and netted almost \$43 billion in return. General Dynamics got a \$17 billion return on their \$18 million investment. Raytheon got a \$19 billion return on \$10 million while TRW got a \$6 billion return on a \$3.5 million outlay. And of course there's George Bush Senior's bin Laden family-connected employer, Carlyle, who netted almost \$4 billion in contracts on a \$6 million investment. Overall, according to a recent study conducted by United for a Fair Economy, CEOs of major defense contractors saw their salaries increase by 79% in 2002 as the nation readied for war.

These folks have all got rich off the backs of the dead and crippled US troops who they claim to be supporting. And their riches come at the expense of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have died due to sanctions and DU poisoning of their environment.

So if you really want to be a patriot – and you really want to wave your flag – do it at a peace rally. Support our troops by bringing them home. Support our country by stripping the defense contractors of their blood money and instead spending it on education and economic development, so that young Americans won't have to march off to war to get a job or an education. This is true patriotism.

For more information about DU weapons, see www.miltoxproj.org/issues.html.

August

NORMAN SOLOMON / AUGUST 1

U.S. media are too soft on the White House

This summer, many journalists seem to be in hot pursuit of the Bush administration. But they have an enormous amount of ground to cover. After routinely lagging behind and detouring around key information, major American news outlets are now playing catch-up.

The default position of U.S. media coverage gave the White House the benefit of doubts. In stark contrast, the British press has been far more vigorous in exposing deceptions about Iraq. Consider the work of two publicly subsidized broadcasters: The BBC News has broken very important stories to boost public knowledge of governmental duplicities; the same can hardly be said for NPR News in the United States.

One of the main problems with American reporting has been reflexive deference toward pivotal administration players like Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. Chronic overreliance on official sources worsened for a long time after 9/11, with journalists failing to scrutinize contradictions, false statements and leaps of illogic.

Powell's watershed speech to the United Nations Security Council in February was so effective at home because journalists swooned rather than drawing on basic debunking information that was readily available at the time. To a great extent, reporters on this side of the Atlantic provided stenography for top U.S. officials, while editorial writers and pundits lavished praise.

The most deferential coverage has been devoted to the president himself, with news outlets treating countless potential firestorms as minor sparks or one-day brush fires. Even now, George W. Bush is benefitting from presumptions of best intentions and essential honesty — a present-day “Teflonization” of the man in the Oval Office.

Midway through July – even while Time’s latest cover was asking “Untruth & Consequences: How Flawed Was the Case for Going to War Against Saddam?” – the president told reporters: “We gave him a chance to allow the inspectors in, and he wouldn’t let them in. And, therefore, after a reasonable request, we decided to remove him from power.” Bush’s assertion about Hussein and the inspectors – that he “wouldn’t let them in” – wasn’t true. Some gingerly noted that the statement was false. But the media response was mild. The president openly uttering significant falsehoods was no big deal.

Meanwhile, reporting on the deaths of U.S. troops in Iraq has been understated. Editor & Publisher online pointed out that while press accounts were saying 33 American soldiers had died between the start of May and July 17, “actually the numbers are much worse – and rarely reported by the media.” During that period, according to official military records, 85 U.S. soldiers died in Iraq. “This includes a staggering number of non-combat deaths ... Nearly all of these people would still be alive if they were back in the States.”

In a follow-up, editor Greg Mitchell reported that his news analysis had caused “the heaviest e-mail response of any article from E&P in the nearly four years I have worked for the magazine.” He added, “These weren’t the usual media junkies or political activists, but an apparent cross-section of backgrounds and beliefs.” Some of the letters were from relatives and friends of U.S. soldiers in Iraq. The strong reactions indicate that American deaths are apt to be politically explosive for the 2004 presidential campaign.

Contradictions have become more glaring at a time when the war’s rising death toll already includes thousands of Iraqis and hundreds of Americans. Many U.S. news organizations are beginning to piece together a grim picture of deceit in Washington and lethal consequences in Iraq. The combination foreshadows a difficult media gauntlet for Bush.

Another key political vulnerability that remains underreported is the economy. Its woes persist in the context of a huge gap between the

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wealthy and most other Americans – a gap that is set to widen still further due to the latest round of White House tax changes and spending priorities. Ironically, this summer’s resurgence of Iraq-related coverage could partly overshadow dire economic news in the coming

months. It’s *deja vu*, with a big difference.

Last summer, the Bush team successfully moved the media focus from economic problems to an uproar about launching a war on Iraq. That was a politically advantageous shift that endured through Election Day. Now, with concerns about Iraq and the economy again dominating front pages, it remains to be seen whether news outlets will accelerate the search for truth or slam on the brakes.

JOHN PILGER / AUGUST 14

The ultimate terror attack

August marks another anniversary of the atomic bombing of Japan, the ultimate act of terrorism in which 231,920 people have now died, the latest, the children of 1945, from a plague of cancers. I first visited Hiroshima 22 years after the atomic bombing. Although the city had been completely rebuilt with glass boxes and ring roads, its suffering was not difficult to find. Beside the river, less than a mile from where the bomb burst, stilts of shacks rose from the silt, and languid human silhouettes searched pyramids of rubbish, providing a glimpse of a Japan few can now imagine.

They were the survivors. Most of them were sick, impoverished, unemployed and socially excluded. Such was the fear of the “atomic plague” that people changed their names; most moved away. The sick received treatment in a crowded state-run hospital. The modern Atomic Bomb Hospital, surrounded by pines and overlooking the city, which the Americans built and ran, took only a few patients for “study”.

On 6 August, the anniversary of the bombing, the Mainichi Shimbun reported that the number of people killed directly and after exposure to radiation had now reached 231,920. Today, in the same hospital wards I visited, there are the children of 1945, dying from a predictable plague of cancers.

The first Allied journalist to reach Hiroshima following the bombing was Wilfred Burchett, the Australian war correspondent of the London Daily Express. Burchett found thousands of survivors suffering mysterious symptoms of internal haemorrhage, spotted skin and hair loss. In a historic despatch to the Express that began, “I write this as a warn-

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ing to the world”, he described the effects of radiation.

The Allied occupation authorities vehemently denied Burchett’s reports. People had died only as a result of the blast, they lied, and the “embedded” Allied press amplified this. “No radioactivity in Hiroshima ruin” was the headline in the New York Times of 13 September 1945. Burchett had his press accreditation withdrawn and was issued with an expulsion order from Japan, which was later rescinded. Japanese film shot in the hospitals was confiscated and sent to Washington, where it was classified as top secret and not released for 23 years.

The true motive for using this ultimate weapon of mass destruction was suppressed even longer. The official truth was that the bomb was dropped to speed the surrender of Japan and save Allied lives. Today, as the public becomes more attuned to the scale of government deception, this was probably the biggest lie of all. As the historian Gar Alperovitz, among others, has documented, US political and military leaders, knowing that Japan’s surrender was already under way, believed the atomic bombing was militarily unnecessary. In 1946 the US Strategic Bombing Survey confirmed this. None of this was shared with the public, nor the belief in Washington that the atomic bomb “experiment” in Japan, as President Truman put it, would demonstrate US primacy to the Russians.

Since then declassified files have shown that the United States has almost used nuclear weapons on at least three occasions: twice in the 1950s, during the Korean war and in Indo-China (against Ho Chi Minh’s forces, which were then routing the French), and during the 1973 Arab/Israeli war. During the 1980s, President Reagan threatened the use of “limited” nuclear weapons, until huge demonstrations in Europe curtailed the American short-range missile programme. Under George W Bush’s essentially Reaganite administration, the US (and British) military’s love affair with nuclear weapons is on the rise again. In 2001, the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the landmark agreement with the Russians signed in 1972. This

was the first time in the nuclear era that Washington had renounced a major arms control accord.

The most important official behind this is John Bolton, the under-secretary of state for arms control and international security: an ironic title, surely, given the extraordinary stand Bolton has taken and the threats he has made. A former Reagan man who is probably the most extreme of George W Bush's "neo-cons", Bolton had his appointment endorsed by Senator Jesse Helms, one of America's greatest war-mongers, with these words: "John Bolton is the kind of man with whom I would want to stand at Armageddon... for the final battle between good and evil."

Bolton is Defence Secretary Rumsfeld's man at the "liberal" State Department. He is a strong advocate of the blurring of the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons. This is described vividly in last year's leaked Nuclear Posture Review, in which the Pentagon expresses its "need" for low-yield nuclear weapons for possible attacks on a shopping list of "enemies of the United States": Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq and North Korea. The inclusion of Iraq is significant. During the long charade about Saddam Hussein's elusive weapons of mass destruction, no mention was made in Washington of US willingness to use nuclear weapons against Iraq. It was left to Britain's Defence Secretary, the caustic Geoff Hoon, to disclose this. On 26 March 2002, Hoon told parliament that "some states" – he mentioned Saddam Hussein by name – "can be absolutely confident that in the right conditions we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons". No British minister has ever made such an outright threat. As Hoon himself later admitted, British policy is merely an extension of US policy.

As for John Bolton, there is little doubt that he has been assigned to lead the charge against North Korea, which has nuclear weapons. Bolton has been travelling the world trying to assemble a "coalition" that will send warships to "interdict" North Korean vessels. Two weeks ago he was in Seoul, where he unleashed a remarkable stream of abuse against the North Korean dictator Kim Jong-il who, he said, ran "a hell-

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ish nightmare”. (In reply, Pyongyang described Bolton as “human scum”.)

Last month I interviewed Bolton in Washington and asked him: “If you stop ships, isn’t there an echo of what happened in 1962, with the threat of nuclear war? Won’t the North Korean regime be moved to defend themselves with the nuclear weapons they have?” He replied that a North Korean ship had already been stopped and “the regime did nothing in response”.

“But if you take action, the nuclear risk is there, isn’t it?” I asked. He replied, “The risk is there if we don’t take action... of them blackmailing other countries.” He quoted Condoleezza Rice, Bush’s closest adviser: “We don’t want to wait for the mushroom cloud.”

Two weeks ago, on the 58th anniversary of Hiroshima’s incineration, a secret conference was held at the Strategic Air Command in Omaha, Nebraska, the base where, 24 hours a day, the United States keeps its “nuclear vigil”. (It was the setting for Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr Strangelove*.) In attendance were cabinet members, generals and leading scientists from America’s three main nuclear weapons laboratories. Members of Congress were banned, even as observers. The agenda was the development of “mini-nukes” for possible use against “rogue states”.

The mantle of the greatest rogue state of all cannot be in doubt. Since the end of the cold war, the United States has repudiated, rejected or subverted all the major treaties designed to prevent war with weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. This is the rampant power to which, says Hoon, we are inexorably tied.

That, not an establishment brawl between the government and the BBC, ought to be our most urgent concern.

GEORGE MONBIOT / AUGUST 19

Poisoned chalice

For how much longer should we give those who run the global economy the benefit of the doubt? The International Monetary Fund has made the same “mistake” so many times that only one explanation appears to remain: it is engineering disaster.

The crises over which it has presided in Thailand, South Korea, Russia and Argentina are well-documented by Joseph Stiglitz, the former chief economist of the World Bank, among others. But we have, until now, lacked a comprehensive description of the way it worked in eastern Europe. A new book by the economist Pongrac Nagy* shows for the first time how the IMF smashed Hungary.

Communist economic management was hopeless: coercive, unaccountable, incompetent and wasteful. So when Hungary began to democratise in the late 1980s, it was plain that a new economic system was required. There were a number of options for transition. But before anyone had considered them, Hungary’s naive and trusting new government was persuaded by the western powers that it had no alternative but to turn to the IMF.

Unless a country’s economic policy is approved by the IMF, it cannot obtain foreign capital. Post-communist Hungary needed foreign capital for just one purpose: to help repay its enormous external debt. It could have applied, as many other countries had done, for debt relief, but the IMF, in the face of substantial evidence, told it that this would deter foreign investors. The only option was to implement the policies the IMF recommended.

It has just one set of policies. Governments must impose restraints upon the supply of money and credit, open the door to foreign capital,

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privatise state assets and cut public spending. It justifies these demands by persuading them that they are suffering from unmanageable debt and galloping inflation.

So in 1990 the IMF told Hungary that it was undergoing an inflationary crisis. Prices, it pointed out, had risen by 17% in 1989. In truth this rise was caused not by inflation (demand outstripping supply), but mainly by policy changes, such as the introduction of VAT and the abolition of subsidies. The IMF insisted on pretending that it was caused by excess demand.

The best way of reducing demand, the IMF maintained, was to restrict the amount of money the banks could lend. So between 1990 and 1996, the central bank ensured that the credit made available to businesses halved. The immediate and predictable result was that interest rates soared (to 50%) and businesses all over Hungary collapsed. As workers were sacked and wages were cut, consumer demand crashed. The IMF, Nagy writes, had “artificially plunged the Hungarian economy into its greatest-ever depression in peacetime”. Between 1990 and 1993, Hungary’s gross domestic product fell by 18%.

Far from curing inflation, this treatment caused it. Between 1993 and 1996, prices rose by 130%. This was not because demand was rising, but simply because it wasn’t falling as fast as supply. But the IMF, once more, treated this new problem as if it was caused by runaway demand. It insisted on further economic restriction, which, predictably enough, pushed Hungary further into depression.

To ensure that Hungary serviced its debt, the IMF demanded that it cut every possible public service, and privatise every possible state asset. Entire economic sectors were flogged swiftly and cheaply, with the result that foreign corporations acquired complete market control. To ensure, in the government’s words, “the desirable reallocation of income – towards the business sector”, Hungary was then obliged to introduce one of the most regressive tax policies in the world: 43% of government revenue came from taxes on consumption, but just 20% from income tax and 14% from business taxes.

All this was carried out, as all IMF programmes are, in conditions of total secrecy and institutional deceit. The lie the IMF tells is that it simply approves the “letter of intent” written by a government, in which the new economic policies are contained. This story relieves it of all responsibility for what happens. But the letter of intent is actually written by the IMF, and simply signed by the government. It is massive and detailed, and guides the economic and political life of the nation for between one and three years. It is entirely confidential. The only sight the people of Hungary have ever received of IMF policy was a leaked letter from a senior IMF official to the finance minister. His demands precisely matched the policies the government was implementing.

One-and-a-half million people (almost 30% of the workforce) lost their jobs. The incomes of those who stayed in work declined by 24%; pensions fell by 31%. By 1996, most people were living on or around subsistence levels. Public services shrivelled. Between 1989 and 1998, the crime rate rose by 166%. This, we must remember, was the result of a process almost universally described as “the triumph of capitalism”.

Then, in 1996, suddenly, without announcement or explanation, the policy changed. The banks were permitted to start issuing credit again and the recession, as a result, came to an immediate end. Over the next four years, industrial production climbed by 45% and gross domestic product by 21%. Wages and pensions began to rise again.

The experiment, in other words, could not have had a clearer outcome. You apply the IMF’s medicine and the economy collapses. You stop, and the economy recovers. It has been repeated often enough for us to trust the results. In Thailand, South Korea, Indonesia, Russia and Argentina, the IMF’s financial liberalisation and forced restrictions led to economic crisis, which was relieved only as those restrictions were lifted. Those nations which refused to take the medicine, even though they were confronting almost identical conditions (Malaysia, China, Poland) prospered while their neighbours collapsed.

So why, knowing what the results will be, does the IMF keep applying the same formula for disaster? It can hardly be through lack of

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expertise. The truth is that the results happen to suit its sponsors very well. While the IMF works mainly in poor nations, it is controlled, through its one-dollar, one-vote system, entirely by the rich. As a result, as Stiglitz says, its programmes reflect “the interests and ideology of the western financial community”.

Desmond Tutu once remarked that: “When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said ‘let us close our eyes and pray’. When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land.” The Hungarians were handed the Bible of economic orthodoxy by its missionaries. Through deceit and secrecy, the IMF ensured that their eyes were shut. By the time they opened them, foreign banks and corporations owned the economy; the public sector was giving way to foreign capital; structural unemployment had produced a pliant and desperate workforce. The IMF, in other words, had engineered the theft of an entire nation. How many more times does this need to happen before we can see what the game is?

* *From Command to Market Economy in Hungary under the Guidance of the IMF, Akademiai Kiado, Budapest.*

MICHAEL I. NIMAN / AUGUST 28

The new American coup

Regular readers of this column and the alternative press in general no doubt have noticed a recent reliance on military and government intelligence sources who are cited in exposes about the Bush administration. In my last two national columns, for example, I've cited a former Marine intelligence officer, an Army Private, an Army Major, an Army Lt. Colonel, an Army Colonel and a CIA counterterrorism specialist. And these aren't your typical retired octogenarian one-foot-in-purgatory ex-military types turned peacenik as they rethink their lives in the shadow of impending death. To the contrary, these are unrepentant warriors who still harbor no qualms about killing on command. Most of them self-identify politically as conservative pro-military Republicans who voted for Ronald Reagan and both Bushes.

Suddenly hard core militarists are joining forces with moderate Democrats and anti-war activists to attack the Bush administration's foreign policy and their use of American troops. And it's these new voices that are supplying the hard evidence exposing how George W. Bush lied to the Congress and the American people in order to garner support for his invasion of Iraq.

The most shocking information available about Bush administration behavior regarding 9/11 and the ensuing wars doesn't come these days from conspiracy theorists on the left, but from right wing military sources. Take recent allegations, for instance, that the CIA attempted to plant weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, only to have their team "taken out" by "friendly fire." This information supposedly comes from a Department of Defense debriefer who has been on the job for 28 years. Her allegations, which I've yet to see proven or disproven, were made

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public by a former Navy Lt. Commander. While I haven't seen enough evidence to validate this story, it is an example of how current and former military officials are attempting to discredit the Bush administration and those in the intelligence community who still support them.

Even the intelligence community is split, with some of the strongest allegations that Bush purposefully lied about WMDs coming from official reports issued by the CIA itself. CIA officials are upset that the Bush administration chose to ignore their intelligence about Iraq, and instead used "intelligence" reports prepared by the Iraqi National Congress (INC), a group of Iraqi ex-patriots with close ties to the Bush family. The CIA terms their information as "unreliable." The problem with the INC, according to Vincent Cannistraro, a former CIA counterterrorism analyst, is that "they make no distinction between intelligence and propaganda." This "cooked information," according to Cannistraro, "goes right into presidential and vice-presidential speeches." The INC's info is self-serving. It created a false threat of weapons of mass destruction which led to war, with the Bush administration now working to install the INC as the occupation government of Iraq. This was all done without the blessing of the CIA. In the end, the Bush administration botched the war exactly as they CIA said they would – and the CIA doesn't want to share the blame.

Everything we're seeing now with whistleblowers emerging from the CIA and the military points to another coup. George W. initially came to power in what Europeans call a coup-de-grace, with Jeb Bush, Kathleen Harris and their crew overseeing the intentional purging of black Democratic voters from Florida's election roles. Despite Bush's pillaging of the economy, his lethal foreign policy blunders and his rampant attacks on the environment and on core American values (such as our former reverence for civil liberties), he seemed to be a sure-win for the 2004 election. This is the predictable result of an unprecedented propaganda campaign launched by a compliant corporate media. The last few weeks, however, have revealed major chinks in George W's armor, the likes of which even Papa Bush's former campaign director

and current Fox News director, Roger Ailes, can't mend.

What we're seeing now is a second, somewhat softer coup. Only this time, it's a military coup. By making public the very information that they would normally bury, the military and intelligence community is undoing the Bush presidency thread by thread. This wasn't always the case. At the onset, the Bush presidency was a general's wet dream. Bush nullified weapons treaties, funded bizarre new weapons programs, increased military spending beyond already astronomical levels, exempted the military from environmental regulations, appointed a former warrior as Secretary of State and gave the military a new elevated status within the national culture. He was also the best president a reactionary could hope for – giving police state surveillance powers to domestic law enforcement agencies as well as to the military intelligence agencies. But things have changed. Even ardent crackheads eventually learn disgust for their dealers.

The honeymoon between Bush and the military, in essence, is over. With Bush on the cusp of sending American troops to battle in a nuclear war in Korea, many in the military are asking for a divorce. The revolt began, as it often does, with the grunts on the front lines. The first hints of a protest rising up from within the military began shortly after Bush declared an “end” to the Iraq war on May Day, leaving over occupying 148,000 troops still bogged down and under attack. As more soldiers were injured or killed, and as morale sank, they began to send email messages of complaint around the US. Their families back home picked up the ball, organizing protests through organization such as Military Families Speak Out and Bring Them Home Now.

Adding insult to injury, the Bush administration both extended tours of duty in hostile areas, and cut pay to the soldiers serving on these tours. The Bush administration is now working to eliminate pay raises previously won by military personal. Hence, soldiers serving in Iraq are facing a \$75 per month cut in their “imminent danger pay” and a \$150 per month cut in their “family separation allowances.” The military community found these cuts so offensive, that even the staid

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Army Times published an editorial condemning them. What we are seeing, in essence, is the destruction of a line that the military community would never previously have crossed, speaking out against its own Commander-in-Chief.

The problem, in the eyes of the military, is that politics aside, this Commander-in-Chief is incompetent and his civilian military leadership is lethally corrupt. Hence, military and intelligence brass seem to be joining the grassroots revolt of the grunts. The reasons for this are many. Incompetent civilian leaders are sending military units off on impossible missions, such as assigning a relatively small force of tired warriors to occupy Iraq and transform it into a western style “democracy.” The military becomes both frustrated with impossible tasks and angered by having to shoulder the perceived fault for failed missions. Most field commanders also feel a responsibility for the personnel under their command. Hence, they resent seeing them poisoned by radioactive depleted uranium weaponry or killed in unnecessary situations. For them, there now seems to be a conflict of interest pitting their concern for the welfare of their troops against White House directives.

The divide between the military and the Bush administration is exasperated by the fact that Bush and his top cabinet members all avoided military service themselves, mostly during the Vietnam war – a war that they all ideologically supported but did not want to fight in. Bush himself used his family’s political connections to secure a non-combatant position in the Texas National Guard, and then went A.W.O.L. (absent without leave) for approximately one year. He again used his political connections to avoid prosecution for going A.W.O.L.

For career military officers, avoiding serving in a war that you ideologically support (without pretenses toward ideological objection), adds up to being a coward. Hence, conservatives coined the term “chickenhawks” to describe the Bush administration. The conservative New Hampshire Gazette researched not only the administration, but their pro-war supporters in congress and the corporate media, creating the chickenhawk database. They cite Dick Cheney, who avoided serv-

ice, telling the media that he had “other priorities.” Rush Limbaugh had a medical deferment due to “anal cysts.” John Ashcroft got a deferment as a business education instructor. Elliot Abrams had a bad back. The Gazette’s list of draft evaders includes Brit Hume, Richard Perle, Tommy Thompson, Paul Wolfowitz, Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, Tom DeLay, Newt Gingrich, Trent Lott, Joseph Lieberman, Roger Ailes, Michael Medved, Bill O’Reilly, Sylvester Stallone, George Will, Ronald Reagan and John Wayne, among dozens of others.

The term “chickenhawk” has become increasingly popular among hawks who back up their archaic beliefs by putting their lives on the line. While they have traditionally supported the chickenhawks politically, due to the chickenhawks rhetorical support of the military, they have little love or respect for what they see as draft dodgers. Hence, when recent events forced seasoned warriors to choose between supporting their troops in the field, or supporting a cadre of hypocrites needlessly exposing their troops to danger, a brave and vocal minority chose supporting the troops. This led to the new and growing phenomenon of military and intelligence agency whistle blowers. With the Bush administration now threatening to start unsustainable wars in Iran and Syria, as well as a potential nuclear conflict in Korea, expect to see more top military officials defect over to the side of reason.

As the military turns against its commander and chief, so will more and more conservative Americans. With the tide turning, journalists might once again muster up the courage to practice their profession – and their corporate employers might just allow them to do so. If current trends continue, this soft military coup will topple the Bush presidency – that is, as long as we’re not distracted by another 9-11 type attack.

For more information about Military Families Speak Out, see www.mfso.org, for Bring Them Home Now, see www.bringthemhomenow.org. To learn more about George W. Bush’s service record, see www.awolbush.com. The chickenhawk database is available at www.nhgazette.com/chickenhawks.html.

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MICHAEL I. NIMAN / SEPTEMBER 2

John Ashcroft: Dangerous dinosaur

The government that seized power in a contested election, crashed our economy, de-funded our schools and hospitals, gutted our environmental regulations, sent our soldiers off to kill and die in a quagmire of a war, and looted the federal treasury with a series of no-bid military contracts to friends and tax cuts for the rich, now wants to finish off their assault on the cornerstone of American society – our civil liberties. But they're acknowledging it's a hard sell.

Since the draconian and oxymoronically named "Patriot Act" was passed by the House and Senate in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (thanks in part to the yes-zombie votes of "liberals" Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer along with the more predictable support of Bushmeister Jack Quinn), the Bush administration has had a hard sell convincing the American people that the emerging Soviet-style police state is somehow All-American.

To date, three states and 151 American cities, towns and counties have passed resolutions condemning the Patriot Act, promising, to varying degrees, not to cooperate with unconstitutional federal Patriot Act investigations in their communities. The revolt is nonpartisan, but all American, with Republicans joining in and sometimes even leading the fight against The Patriot Act.

It's as if a form of political amnesia has set in, with politicians forgetting how, in the political Tsunami after the 9/11 attacks, they voted to enact a 340-page piece of legislation that few of them read, and even fewer of them understood. With flags waving over the smoldering ruins of the Twin Towers, few politicians had the political backbone to oppose a bill nicknamed the "Patriot" Act, even though, in hindsight,

it would have been the patriotic thing to do. The bill passed the Senate 98-1, opposed only by Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold. George W. Bush signed it into law on October 26, 2001.

The Patriot Act expanded the federal government's ability to spy on American citizens by tapping our phones, examining our credit card records, and scrutinizing our reading lists by examining our bookstore purchases, library borrowing records and internet surfing habits. One provision of the bill gave Attorney General John Ashcroft the power to unilaterally certify non-citizens as "terrorist suspects," who could be detained indefinitely without charge and without the government presenting any evidence or holding a judicial review of the case.

One of the few voices in opposition to the act in 2001 was New York Representative Jerrold Nadler, who warned, "The Attorney General under this provision has carte blanche [to order] a suspect to stay in jail forever." The bill also allowed for "secret" detentions, in essence nullifying the habeas corpus (show us the body) provisions of American law. Since the act passed, Ashcroft's Justice Department has ordered scores of people secretly detained without charges as "material witnesses." The Department of Justice under Ashcroft has also prosecuted people in secret military tribunals where defendants are routinely denied independent counsel or communication with family members – in effect making a mockery of the American criminal justice system which was formerly a model for the world.

The only saving grace of the Patriot Act is that the most odious provisions are set to expire in 2005. John Ashcroft, however, doesn't just want to breathe new life into the Patriot Act, extending it, much like the new detention policy it heralded, indefinitely – he wants to expand it with a new enhanced Patriot Act II (The Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003). Like the sequel to a B-grade Horror film, Patriot II will shred what remains of the constitution like a Patriot Missile tearing into a library live on Fox News.

Specifically, Patriot II will challenge the protections of the First (Freedom of Speech and Assembly), Fourth (Freedom from

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Unreasonable Searches and Seizures), Fifth (right to confront witnesses and right to a fair and speedy trial), Sixth (no excessive bail) and Fourteenth (Right to due process and equal protection) amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Ashcroft's bill will enhance the FBI's ability to spy on citizens without having to secure permission from a judge. Hence, the FBI will be able to target political opponents and then go fishing for charges. The original Patriot Act allowed the FBI to spy on domestic political opposition groups. The expanded powers sought under Patriot II will allow the FBI to continue this practice, but be exempt from having to explain themselves to a judge, hence anti-corporate globalization protesters, anti-war protesters, environmentalists, as well as anti-abortion and pro-choice protesters and gun owners' advocacy groups could all find themselves under FBI surveillance. In short, anyone patriotically exercising their duty to protest could be subject to FBI surveillance – a reality that will thwart democratic participation in our political discourse.

Where the Patriot Act allowed the government to detain non-citizens indefinitely, Patriot II allows Ashcroft's Justice Department to strip Americans of their US citizenship, and hence, of their constitutional rights. Under this provision, the ante for speaking out against the Bush junta will suddenly rise to astronomical levels, with ordinary Americans potentially facing indefinite detention without trial. This is the ultimate nightmare of Ashcroft's America – a nation that in no way resembles the America that existed at the turn of the millennium. Another proposed sequel to the Patriot Act, the Victory Act, applies a legal veneer to Orwellian language, reclassifying the sale of illegal drugs, as a "terrorist" offense created under a "narcoterrorism" provision. Hence, accused drug dealers can face the same threats to their due process as accused terrorists – all while the real fight against terrorism crashes and burns in a political quagmire with the FBI distracted by witch hunts draining both its resources and its moral imperative. Under this scenario the FBI could devolve into a Gestapo-esque organization that citizens would fear, rather than cooperate with.

The entire Ashcroft assault on American values was quite predictable given John Ashcroft's political background. The voters of Missouri eventually tired of Ashcroft and decided they would rather be represented by a dead man than by John Ashcroft, voting for Mel Carnahan for Senator over Ashcroft after the former was killed in a small plane crash two weeks before the election. George W. Bush, however, quickly nominated the jilted Ashcroft as U.S. Attorney General – a nomination to which a quisling Democratic Party controlled Senate acquiesced.

Before his ascension to the throne of Attorney General, Ashcroft, as governor of Missouri, presided over and celebrated the resumption of that state's death penalty – this despite questions concerning racial bias in executions. He stuck to his hang-em-high mantra even as other Republicans abandoned support for the death penalty in face of mounting evidence documenting how wrongfully-convicted people are often executed. A gleeful Ashcroft oversaw Missouri's first execution in 24 years. As U.S. Attorney General, he has overridden the recommendations of federal prosecutors in at least 28 cases, forcing them to seek the death penalty despite their better judgment. His new Patriot Act will expand federal law to include 15 additional crimes punishable by execution.

Racial bias, whether in executions or any other aspect of American life, doesn't seem to be a problem for Ashcroft. As Missouri's Attorney General, he fought against that state's federally-ordered school desegregation program. In 1984, 20 years after the pitched battles of the civil right era, he was still stumping against desegregation, making his opposition to school desegregation an issue in his racially divisive campaign for governor of Missouri.

He's also an ardent opponent of affirmative action, cosponsoring a 1997 Senate bill that would have banned affirmative action-based hiring on federal contracts while not addressing the still present biases that gave rise to affirmative action in the first place. As a Senator, Ashcroft voted against expanding hate-crimes legislation and enhanc-

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ing the Justice Department's ability to prosecute bias crimes. He also actively fought to exempt bias crimes directed against homosexuals from prosecution under existing hate crimes statutes.

It's no surprise that John Ashcroft came to power after losing his own election, riding the coattails of a stolen election. Ashcroft has a history of thwarting the democratic process. The Florida election was captured after, among other things, a company with ties to the Republican Party was hired by the Republican state Attorney General to "cleanse" the voter lists – ultimately removing enough legitimate black and Democratic voters from the rolls to throw the election irrespective of butterfly ballots and chads.

For Ashcroft, this is politics as usual. As governor of Missouri, he vetoed a bill, despite overwhelming support, which would have made it as easy to conduct voter registration drives in the predominantly black inner city of St. Louis, as it was in the suburbs, where elections commissioners could freely deputize volunteers to run registration drives – something that couldn't happen in the city. The result of this inequality was a 90% registration rate in the predominantly white and Republican suburbs and a 70% rate in the predominantly Democratic City of St. Louis. At the time, the executive director of the Missouri Citizen Education Fund said, "Mr. Ashcroft's vetoes show a disturbing commitment to maintaining separate and unequal access to voter registration for African-Americans." Today, Ashcroft is the main law enforcement officer responsible for protecting equal access to voting.

As Attorney General, Ashcroft is also responsible for maintaining the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state – a suspicious task for an ardent supporter of bringing official sectarian prayer into public schools. Ashcroft, in fact, has made a mockery of this responsibility by turning the Justice Department into the most obvious violator of this separation, with the Attorney General leading daily sectarian prayer and bible study meetings on Justice Department property. The participants are Ashcroft's underlings, raising the specter of religious harassment in a work environment where a supervisor promotes

his own religion.

The federal law that the Justice Department is supposed to be enforcing mandates that workplace supervisors should not create an environment where employees perceive any coercion to practice a particular religion, or any religion for that matter. In 1999, while speaking at the commencement exercise of the fundamentalist Bob Jones University, Ashcroft described America as “being godly and eternal, not being civic and temporal.” He went on to explain that since America is eternal, “We have no king but Jesus.” With an Attorney General anointing his own deity as the nation’s one and only “king” while calling for school prayer, pluralism is in grave danger.

Ashcroft claims to be pro-family. However, in a society riddled by broken homes, where we should be seeking family wherever we can find it, Ashcroft is an outspoken opponent of gay marriage, domestic partnership, and any other legal convention that recognizes gay families. He’s also an outspoken opponent of family planning, having supported the “Human Life Act” – a piece of anti-abortion legislation so virulent that it could also, according to critics, be interpreted to outlaw birth control pills and the I.U.D. While in Ashcroft’s world, zygotes and fetuses have legal rights, children do not. Despite a 68% drop in juvenile crime during the 1990s, Ashcroft repeatedly sponsored legislation requiring states to try children 14-years-old and older, as adults, and to create new mandatory sentences for juvenile offenders – in effect replacing school with prison and all but guaranteeing that troubled children grow up into violent adults.

Ashcroft has always had a strange view of power and who should wield it. As a senator he supported eliminating the Federal Communications Commission’s authority to regulate corporate mergers in the communications industry despite the anti-trust issues involved with corporations such as ClearChannel, a large Republican Party donor, monopolizing local broadcast markets. Yet, as Missouri Attorney General, he filed a bizarre anti-trust suit against the National Organization of Women in an unsuccessful attempt to thwart an

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organized boycott of states that wouldn't ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. He believes in giving police state powers to the FBI to snoop on political opponents of the Bush administration and their corporate overlords, yet he opposes a ban on assault weapons (in Ashcroft's America, gun ownership may be your last remaining right). As Attorney General, he gutted the Brady Bill, ordering the FBI to destroy all records of firearms transactions, including those related to assault and sniper rifle purchases. Ironically, this lost database could have provided the FBI with more tools for combating potential terrorism than would be gleaned in a million years of spying on Women in Black and other pacifist groups.

This is another problem with John Ashcroft. Much of what he does and says makes little logical sense. Of all of daddy's friends who landed at the George Junior White House, Ashcroft, whether he's draping lady liberty's statue in velour or singing "Let the Eagles Soar" on national TV, is the weirdest. His actions often defy logic, but they always adhere to a draconian political dogma. It's this agenda that Ashcroft is hell-bent on imposing on America that makes him one of the most dangerous dinosaurs to return to Federal government. The U.S. Attorney General is charged with enforcing the provisions of the constitution and protecting the rights of the American People. Ashcroft, however, is a fervent opponent of the Bill of Rights and is using his office to attack the very American values he was empowered to protect. In doing so, he has frightened not only opponents on the left, but on the right as well. Hence, as he pushes ahead hawking a new, more frightening, more un-American Patriot Act, he is suddenly finding himself in political hot water.

True to form for a demagog, he's doing the only thing he knows how to do – turning up the heat. This week he's in deeper and hotter water after asking United States Attorneys to lobby local federal lawmakers in support of the new Patriot Act. This, according to Democratic members of Congress, is illegal. It also undermines the authority of U.S. Attorneys as supposedly impartial champions of the law while further

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polarizing the nation at a time when we need to be joining together.

Over his head in hot water and with both of his Patriot Bills on the line, John Ashcroft is taking his trip on the road, hitting 18 cities in what The Christian Science Monitor calls, "Ashcroft on tour, and unplugged." Unplugged and running out of juice as it may be, this Big Brother Road Show is coming to Buffalo on Monday, September 8th – with Ashcroft stumping for his new legislation at the Buffalo Hyatt at 8:00 A.M. Doomed as the new Patriot Act looks today, recent history has shown us that all it takes for spineless Democrats and subservient Republicans to pass draconian un-American legislation is one act of horror. In the cloud of a terrorists' bomb, democracy as we know it may be blown to hell. It's for this reason that people around the country are speaking out in defense of civil liberties and against John Ashcroft and his agenda. When he arrives in Buffalo, he'll be greeted, no doubt, like he has been in other cities, by patriotic protestors whose beliefs span the political spectrum. With our democracy hanging in the balance, now is the time to exercise our rights and speak out for real American values.

Various local groups are organizing demonstrations to peacefully greet John Ashcroft when he comes to Buffalo on Monday morning. While details have not yet been finalized, people who want to protest in support of or against John Ashcroft should arrive early. Organizers will be working in cooperation with the Buffalo Police Department to accommodate peaceful protests.

NORMAN SOLOMON / SEPTEMBER 11, 2003

Triumph of the media mill

Without a hint of irony, the “NewsHour” on PBS concluded its Sept. 9 program with a warm interview of Henry Kissinger and then a segment about a renowned propagandist for the Nazi war machine. Kissinger talked about his latest book. Then a professor of German history talked about Leni Riefenstahl, the path-breaking documentary filmmaker who just died at age 101. The conversation was cozy with Kissinger, the man who served as the preeminent architect of U.S. policy during the last half-dozen years of the Vietnam War. Tossed his way by host Jim Lehrer, the questions ranged from softball to beach ball. And when the obsequious session ended, Lehrer went beyond politeness: “Dr. Kissinger, good to see you. Thank you for being with us. Good luck on your book.”

After focusing on Kissinger’s efforts during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the “NewsHour” interview last Tuesday discussed his role in the April 1975 final withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. Previously, Kissinger had been the Nixon administration’s main foreign-policy man while more than 25,000 American soldiers and upwards of 500,000 Vietnamese people – most of them civilians – were killed.

The Nixon-Kissinger policies in Southeast Asia also included illegal and deadly bombing of Cambodia, where the Pentagon flew 3,630 raids over a period of 14 months in 1969 and 1970. (Cambodia’s neutrality in the Cold War and the Vietnam War had infuriated Washington.) Military records were falsified to hide the bombing from Congress. Massive carnage among civilians also resulted from U.S. air strikes on Laos.

But in September 2003, the man who largely oversaw those activi-

ties sat under bright TV lights and basked in yet more media deference. This is routinely the case for Kissinger. But not always.

Once in a great while, a mainstream news outlet summons the gumption necessary to explore grim truth about those in our midst who have exercised bloody power. That's what happened in February 2001, when "NewsHour" correspondent Elizabeth Farnsworth interviewed Kissinger about his direct contact with Gen. Augusto Pinochet, the Chilean dictator who came to power in a coup on Sept. 11, 1973. Kissinger was President Nixon's national security advisor at the time of the coup.

Nearly three years after that military coup – which overthrew the elected socialist president Salvador Allende – Kissinger huddled with Gen. Pinochet in Chile. By then, Kissinger was in his third year as secretary of state; by then, thousands of political prisoners had died, and many more had been tortured, at the hands of the Pinochet regime. At the 1976 meeting, a declassified memo says, Kissinger told Pinochet: "We are sympathetic with what you are trying to do here."

Farnsworth confronted Kissinger about the memo's contents during the 2001 interview. She asked him point-blank about the discussion with Pinochet: "Why did you not say to him, 'You're violating human rights. You're killing people. Stop it.?'"

Kissinger replied: "First of all, human rights were not an international issue at the time, the way they have become since. That was not what diplomats and secretaries of state and presidents were saying generally to anybody in those days." He added that at the June 1976 meeting with Pinochet, "I spent half my time telling him that he should improve his human rights performance in any number of ways."

But the American envoy's concern was tactical. As Farnsworth noted in her reporting: "Kissinger did bring up human rights violations, saying they were making it difficult for him to get aid for Chile from Congress."

During the past quarter of a century, Kissinger has become a multimillionaire as a wheeler-dealer international consultant and member

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of numerous boards at huge corporations, including media firms. Along the way, he has accumulated many friends in high media places. When Washington Post Co. owner Katharine Graham wrote her autobiography, she praised Kissinger as a dear friend and all-around wonderful person.

As it happened, the latest “NewsHour” interview with Kissinger came just two days before the 30th anniversary of the coup in Chile. Although declassified documents show that Kissinger was deeply involved in making that coup possible, Lehrer’s hospitality was such that the anchor did not mention it.

Minutes later, during another “NewsHour” interview, historian Claudia Koonz was aptly pointing out that Riefenstahl “saw herself as a documentary maker, not as a propagandist. But what she understood so much before anyone else is that the best propaganda is invisible. It looks like a documentary. Then you realize all you’re seeing is glory, beauty and triumph, and you don’t see the darker side.”

The millions of people who have mourned the victims of the U.S. war in Southeast Asia might feel that such words describe the standard U.S. media coverage of Henry Kissinger.

GEORGE MONBIOT / SEPTEMBER 16

A threat to the rich

Were there a Nobel Prize for hypocrisy, it would be awarded this year to Pascal Lamy, the EU's trade negotiator. A week ago, in the Guardian's trade supplement, he argued that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) "helps us move from a Hobbesian world of lawlessness into a more Kantian world – perhaps not exactly of perpetual peace, but at least one where trade relations are subject to the rule of law".

On Sunday, by treating the trade talks as if, in Thomas Hobbes's words, they were "a war of every man against every man", Lamy scuppered the negotiations, and very possibly destroyed the organisation as a result. If so, one result could be a trade regime, in which, as Hobbes observed, "force and fraud are ... the two cardinal virtues". Relations between countries would then revert to the state of nature the philosopher feared, where the nasty and brutish behaviour of the powerful ensures that the lives of the poor remain short.

At the talks in Cancun, in Mexico, Lamy made the poor nations an offer that they couldn't possibly accept. He appears to have been seeking to resurrect, by means of an "investment treaty", the infamous Multilateral Agreement on Investment. This was a proposal that would have allowed corporations to force a government to remove any laws that interfered with their ability to make money, and that was crushed by a worldwide revolt in 1998.

In return for granting corporations power over governments, the poor nations would receive precisely nothing. The concessions on farm subsidies that Lamy was offering amounted to little more than a reshuffling of the money paid to European farmers. They would continue to permit the subsidy barons of Europe to dump their artificially cheap produce into the poor world, destroying the livelihoods of the

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farmers there.

Of course, as Hobbes knew, “if other men will not lay down their right ... then there is no reason for anyone to divest himself of his: for that were to expose himself to prey”. A contract, he noted, is “the mutual transferring of right”, which a man enters into “either in consideration of some right reciprocally transferred to himself, or for some other good he hopeth for thereby”. By offering the poorer nations nothing in return for almost everything, Lamy forced them to walk out.

The trade commissioner took this position because he sees his public duty as the defence of the corporations and industrial farmers of the EU against all comers, be they the citizens of Europe or the people of other nations. He imagined that, according to the laws of nature that have hitherto governed the WTO, the weaker parties would be forced to capitulate and forced to grant to the corporations the little that had not already been stolen from them. He stuck to it even when it became clear that the poor nations were, for the first time, prepared to mobilise – as the state of nature demands – a collective response to aggression.

I dwell on Pascal Lamy's adherence to the treasured philosophy of cant because all that he has done, he has done in our name. The UK and the other countries of Europe do not negotiate directly at the WTO, but through the EU. He is therefore our negotiator, who is supposed to represent our interests. But it is hard to find anyone in Europe not employed by or not beholden to the big corporations who sees Lamy's negotiating position as either desirable or just.

Several European governments, recognising that it threatened the talks and the trade organisation itself, slowly distanced themselves from his position. To many people's surprise, they included Britain. Though Pascal Lamy is by no means the only powerful man in Europe who is obsessed with the rights of corporations, his behaviour appears to confirm the most lurid of the tabloid scare stories about Eurocrats running out of control.

But while this man has inflicted lasting damage to Europe's global reputation, he may not have succeeded in destroying the hopes of the

poorer nations. For something else is now beginning to shake itself awake. The developing countries, for the first time in some 20 years, are beginning to unite and to move as a body.

That they have not done so before is testament first to the corrosive effects of the cold war, and second to the continued ability of the rich and powerful nations to bribe, blackmail and bully the poor ones. Whenever there has been a prospect of solidarity among the weak, the strong – and in particular the US – have successfully divided and ruled them, by promising concessions to those who split and threatening sanctions against those who stay. But now the rich have become victims of their own power.

Since its formation, the rich countries have been seeking to recruit as many developing nations into the WTO as they can, in order to open up the developing countries' markets and force them to trade on onerous terms. However, as the rich have done so, they have found themselves massively outnumbered. The EU and the US may already be regretting their efforts to persuade China to join. It has now become the rock – too big to bully and threaten – around which the unattached nations have begun to cluster.

Paradoxically, it was precisely because the demands being made by Lamy and (to a lesser extent) the US were so outrageous that the smaller nations could not be dragged away from this new coalition. Whatever the US offered by way of inducements and threats, they simply had too much to lose if the poor countries allowed the rich bloc's proposals to pass. And their solidarity is itself empowering. At Cancun the weak nations stood up to the most powerful negotiators on earth and were not broken.

The lesson they will bring home is that if this is possible, almost anything is. Suddenly the proposals for global justice that relied on solidarity for their implementation can spring into life. While the WTO might have been buried, these nations may, if they use their collective power intelligently, still find a way of negotiating together. They might even disinter it as the democratic body it was always supposed to have

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been.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had better watch their backs now. The UN security council will find its anomalous powers ever harder to sustain. Poor nations, if they stick together, can begin to exercise a collective threat to the rich. For this, they need leverage and, in the form of their debts, they possess it. Together they owe so much that, in effect, they own the world's financial systems. By threatening, collectively, to default, they can begin to wield the sort of power that only the rich have so far exercised, demanding concessions in return for withholding force.

So Pascal Lamy, “our” negotiator, may accidentally have engineered a better world, by fighting so doggedly for a worse one.

JOHN PILGER / SEPTEMBER 22

Colin Powell said Iraq was no threat

Exactly one year ago, Tony Blair told Parliament: “Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction programme is active, detailed and growing. “The policy of containment is not working. The weapons of mass destruction programme is not shut down. It is up and running now.”

Not only was every word of this false, it was part of a big lie invented in Washington within hours of the attacks of September 11 2001 and used to hoodwink the American public and distract the media from the real reason for attacking Iraq. “It was 95 per cent charade,” a former senior CIA analyst told me.

An investigation of files and archive film for my TV documentary *Breaking The Silence*, together with interviews with former intelligence officers and senior Bush officials have revealed that Bush and Blair knew all along that Saddam Hussein was effectively disarmed.

Both Colin Powell, US Secretary of State, and Condoleezza Rice, President Bush’s closest adviser, made clear before September 11 2001 that Saddam Hussein was no threat – to America, Europe or the Middle East.

In Cairo, on February 24 2001, Powell said: “He (Saddam Hussein) has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbours.”

This is the very opposite of what Bush and Blair said in public.

Powell even boasted that it was the US policy of “containment” that had effectively disarmed the Iraqi dictator – again the very opposite of what Blair said time and again. On May 15 2001, Powell went further and said that Saddam Hussein had not been able to “build his military

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back up or to develop weapons of mass destruction” for “the last 10 years”. America, he said, had been successful in keeping him “in a box”.

Two months later, Condoleezza Rice also described a weak, divided and militarily defenceless Iraq. “Saddam does not control the northern part of the country,” she said. “We are able to keep his arms from him. His military forces have not been rebuilt.”

So here were two of Bush’s most important officials putting the lie to their own propaganda, and the Blair government’s propaganda that subsequently provided the justification for an unprovoked, illegal attack on Iraq. The result was the deaths of what reliable studies now put at 50,000 people, civilians and mostly conscript Iraqi soldiers, as well as British and American troops. There is no estimate of the countless thousands of wounded.

In a torrent of propaganda seeking to justify this violence before and during the invasion, there were occasional truths that never made headlines. In April last year, Condoleezza Rice described September 11 2001 as an “enormous opportunity” and said America “must move to take advantage of these new opportunities.”

Taking over Iraq, the world’s second biggest oil producer, was the first such opportunity.

At 2.40pm on September 11, according to confidential notes taken by his aides, Donald Rumsfeld, the Defense Secretary, said he wanted to “hit” Iraq – even though not a shred of evidence existed that Saddam Hussein had anything to do with the attacks on New York and Washington. “Go massive,” the notes quote Rumsfeld as saying. “Sweep it all up. Things related and not.” Iraq was given a brief reprieve when it was decided instead to attack Afghanistan. This was the “softest option” and easiest to explain to the American people – even though not a single September 11 hijacker came from Afghanistan. In the meantime, securing the “big prize”, Iraq, became an obsession in both Washington and London.

An Office of Special Plans was hurriedly set up in the Pentagon for the sole purpose of converting “loose” or unsubstantiated intelligence

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into US policy. This was a source from which Downing Street received much of the “evidence” of weapons of mass destruction we now know to be phoney.

Contrary to Blair’s denials at the time, the decision to attack Iraq was set in motion on September 17 2001, just six days after the attacks on New York and Washington.

On that day, Bush signed a top-secret directive, ordering the Pentagon to begin planning “military options” for an invasion of Iraq. In July 2002, Condoleezza Rice told another Bush official who had voiced doubts about invading Iraq: “A decision has been made. Don’t waste your breath.”

The ultimate cynicism of this cover-up was expressed by Rumsfeld himself only last week. When asked why he thought most Americans still believed Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks of September 11, he replied: “I’ve not seen any indication that would lead me to believe I could say that.”

It is this that makes the Hutton inquiry in London virtually a sham. By setting up an inquiry solely into the death of the weapons expert David Kelly, Blair has ensured there will be no official public investigation into the real reasons he and Bush attacked Iraq and into when exactly they made that decision. He has ensured there will be no headlines about disclosures in email traffic between Downing Street and the White House, only secretive tittle-tattle from Whitehall and the smearing of the messenger of Blair’s misdeeds.

The sheer scale of this cover-up makes almost laughable the forensic cross-examination of the BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan about “anomalies” in the notes of his interview with David Kelly – when the story Gilligan told of government hypocrisy and deception was basically true.

Those pontificating about Gilligan failed to ask one vital question – why has Lord Hutton not recalled Tony Blair for cross-examination? Why is Blair not being asked why British sovereignty has been handed over to a gang in Washington whose extremism is no longer doubted

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by even the most conservative observers? No one knows the Bush extremists better than Ray McGovern, a former senior CIA officer and personal friend of George Bush senior, the President's father. In *Breaking The Silence*, he tells me: "They were referred to in the circles in which I moved when I was briefing at the top policy levels as 'the crazies'."

"Who referred to them as 'the crazies'?" I asked.

"All of us... in policy circles as well as intelligence circles... There is plenty of documented evidence that they have been planning these attacks for a long time and that 9/11 accelerated their plan. (The weapons of mass destruction issue) was all contrived, so was the connection of Iraq with al Qaeda. It was all PR... Josef Goebbels had this dictum: If you say something often enough, the people will believe it." He added: "I think we ought to be all worried about fascism (in the United States)."

The "crazies" include John Bolton, Under Secretary of State, who has made a personal mission of tearing up missile treaties with the Russians and threatening North Korea, and Douglas Feith, an Under Secretary of Defence, who ran a secret propaganda unit "reworking" intelligence about Iraq's weapons. I interviewed them both in Washington.

Bolton boasted to me that the killing of as many as 10,000 Iraqi civilians in the invasion was "quite low if you look at the size of the military operation."

For raising the question of civilian casualties and asking which country America might attack next, I was told: "You must be a member of the Communist Party."

Over at the Pentagon, Feith, No 3 to Rumsfeld, spoke about the "precision" of American weapons and denied that many civilians had been killed. When I pressed him, an army colonel ordered my cameraman: "Stop the tape!" In Washington, the wholesale deaths of Iraqis is unmentionable. They are non-people; the more they resist the Anglo-American occupation, the more they are dismissed as "terrorists".

It is this slaughter in Iraq, a crime by any interpretation of an international law, that makes the Hutton inquiry absurd. While his lordship and the barristers play their semantic games, the spectre of thousands of dead human beings is never mentioned, and witnesses to this great crime are not called.

Jo Wilding, a young law graduate, is one such witness. She was one of a group of human rights observers in Baghdad during the bombing. She and the others lived with Iraqi families as the missiles and cluster bombs exploded around them. Where possible, they would follow the explosions to scenes of civilian casualties and trace the victims to hospitals and mortuaries, interviewing the eyewitnesses and doctors. She kept meticulous notes.

She saw children cut to pieces by shrapnel and screaming because there were no anaesthetics or painkillers. She saw Fatima, a mother stained with the blood of her eight children. She saw streets, mosques and farmhouses bombed by marauding aircraft. "Nothing could explain them," she told me, "other than that it was a deliberate attack on civilians."

As these atrocities were carried out in our name, why are we not hearing such crucial evidence? And why is Blair allowed to make yet more self-serving speeches, and none of them from the dock? JP

October

NORMAN SOLOMON / OCTOBER 2

Unmasking the ugly 'anti-American'

Strong critics of U.S. foreign policy often encounter charges of “anti-Americanism.” Even though vast numbers of people in the United States disagree with Washington’s assumptions and military actions, some pundits can’t resist grabbing onto a timeworn handle of pseudo-patriotic demagoguery.

In a typical outburst before the war on Iraq last spring, Rush Limbaugh told his radio audience: “I want to say something about these anti-war demonstrators. No, let’s not mince words, let’s call them what they are — anti-American demonstrators.”

Weeks later, former Congressman Joe Scarborough, a Republican now rising through the ranks of talking heads, said on MSNBC: “These leftist stooges for anti-American causes are always given a free pass. Isn’t it time to make them stand up and be counted for their views, which could hurt American troop morale?”

Today, in an era when the sun never sets on deployed American troops, the hoary epithet is not only a rhetorical weapon against domestic dissenters or foreign foes. It’s also useful for brandishing against allies. Oddly, in recent months, across the narrow spectrum of U.S. mainstream punditry, even European unity has been portrayed as “anti-American.”

An extensive article by Andrew Sullivan at the outset of the summer, in the mildly liberal *New Republic*, warned that “with the unveiling of a new federalist constitution for a ‘United States of Europe’ in June, the anti-American trend will be subtly but profoundly institutionalized.” Sullivan added: “It’s past time that Americans wake up and see this new threat for what it is.”

Similar noises have come from right-wing outlets such as *The*

Weekly Standard. Under the stern headline “America needs a serious Europe policy,” a contributing editor declared that “the anti-American drift of the EU is cause for concern. At a minimum, it should lead Washington to rethink its traditional enthusiasm for greater European integration. Much as British entry into the euro zone might make life easier for American businesses (and tourists), it is sure to make life more difficult for American diplomats.” And, the article could have added, for American war planners.

The elastic “anti-American” label stretches along a wide gamut. The routine aim is to disparage and stigmatize activities or sentiments that displease policymakers in Washington. Thus, “anti-American” has spanned from al-Qaida terrorists, to angry Iraqis tiring of occupation, to recalcitrant German and French leaders, to Labor Party backbenchers in Britain’s House of Commons.

Any Americans gauged to be insufficiently supportive of U.S. government policies may also qualify for similar aspersions. (During a debate on CNN International this year, a fervent war supporter proclaimed me to be a “self-hating American.”)

The officials now running Washington are intoxicated with priorities that involve spending more than \$1 billion a day on the U.S. military. Meanwhile, the media support for de facto empire-building is tinged with sometimes-harsh criticism — without urging forthright resistance to a succession of wars largely driven by the USA. In many cases, the fear of being called “anti-American” seems to match tacit enthusiasm for visions of pax Americana.

A few weeks before he became the New York Times executive editor, Bill Keller wrote in a June 14 essay about the Iraq intelligence debacle: “The truth is that the information-gathering machine designed to guide our leaders in matters of war and peace shows signs of being corrupted. To my mind, this is a worrisome problem, but not because it invalidates the war we won. It is a problem because it weakens us for the wars we still face.”

“The wars we still face” are chronically touted as imperatives. In the

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months and years ahead, many commentators will keep equating opposition to military actions with “anti-Americanism.”

But the fog of such rhetoric cannot hide destructive agendas. A lengthy mid-summer report in the Los Angeles Times concluded that top Pentagon officials “are studying the lessons of Iraq closely — to ensure that the next U.S. takeover of a foreign country goes more smoothly.”

A special assistant to Donald Rumsfeld was upbeat. “We’re going to get better over time,” said Lawrence Di Rita. “We’ve always thought of post-hostilities as a phase” apart from combat, but “the future of war is that these things are going to be much more of a continuum. ... We’ll get better as we do it more often.”

While political commanders plan to “do it more often,” those of us who oppose them can expect to hear that we’re “anti-American.”

JOHN PILGER / OCTOBER 9

The rise and fall of liberal England

An epic shame and silence covers much of liberal England. Shame and silence are present in a political theatre of frenetic activity, with actors running on and off the national stage, uttering their fables and denials and minor revelations, as in Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*. From the media gallery, there is a cryptic gesturing at the truth, so that official culpability is minimised; this is known at the BBC as objectivity.

Shame and silence reached a sort of crescendo during the recent conference of the Labour Party. Hundreds of liberal people stood and clapped for the Prime Minister, it was reported, for seven and a half minutes. Choreographed in their pretence, like the surviving stoics of a sect, they applauded his unctuous abuse of the only truth that mattered: that he had committed a huge and bloody crime, in their and our name. It was a shocking spectacle.

For those who cling to Blair, the last resort is to make him seem Shakespearean: to invest him with tragedy and the humanity of "blunders" and "cock ups" that might divert the trail of blood and conceal the responsibility he shares for the slaughter and suffering of thousands of men, women and children, whose fate he sealed secretly and mendaciously with the rampant American warlord.

We know the fine print of this truth now: and we are a majority. I use "we" here as the Chartist James Bronterre O'Brien used it in 1838, to separate the ordinary people of England from "the vagabonds" who oppress "what are called our colonies and [which really] belong to our enemies". The criminality of Blair and his diminishing court is felt across this country. It is sweeping aside those in the Labour Party who still plead, "Listen to us, Tony" and "Please have more humility, Tony."

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The silence of famous liberals is understandable. Remember the division they skilfully drew in 1997 between “new” and “old”. New was unquestionably good for “us”. New was a “modernised” system called neoliberalism, as old and rapacious as its Thatcherite model. Their propaganda suppressed every reliable indication (such as the venerable British Social Attitudes survey), which left no doubt that most of the British people had “old” priorities and rejected Blair’s ruthless refusal to redistribute the national wealth from the rich to the poor and to protect public services, the premise of so much of British life, just as they rejected his embrace of the City of London and American dominance and warmongering.

The Blair myth was that he was “untainted by dogma” (Roy Hattersley). The opposite was true. For Blair, the issue was always class. When times were more secure, the liberal wing of the middle class would allot a rung or two of their ladder to those below. The ladder was hauled up by Margaret Thatcher as her revolution spread beyond miners and steelworkers and into the suburbs and gentrified terraces, where middle managers suddenly found themselves “shed” and “redundant”. It was to people like these that Labour under Neil Kinnock, then John Smith, then Blair, looked in order to win power. Middle-classness became the political code, as the middle classes sought, above all else, to restore their status and privileges. An ideological Scrabble was played in order to justify the Blair project’s true aims. The “stakeholder” theory was briefly promoted, and there was chatter about “civic” society. Both were new names for old elites. The archaic word “governance” was used to obfuscate real social democracy. There was enthusiasm for the ideas of an American “communitarian” guru who wrote books of psychobabble that impressed Bill Clinton. A “think tank” called Demos filled up the Guardian tabloid on slow days with vacuous chic. Out of this was promoted something called “Middle England”, a middle-class idyll similar to that described by John Major when he yearned for cycling spinsters, cricket and warm beer. That one in four Britons lived in poverty was unmentionable.

When Blair was elected with fewer votes than Major received in 1992,

liberalism's principal organs were beside themselves. "Goodbye xenophobia" and "The Foreign Office says 'Hello world, remember us?'" , rejoiced the Observer. Blair, said the paper, would sign the EU Social Chapter within weeks, push for "new worldwide rules on human rights and the environment", ban landmines, implement "tough new limits on all other arms sales" and end "the country-house tradition of policy-making". Apart from the landmines ban, which was in effect already in place, all of it was false.

Then it was "Welfare: the New Deal". The Chancellor, said the Observer, "is preparing to announce the most radical welfare Budget since the Second World War". On the contrary, what Gordon Brown announced was a "welfare-to-work" scheme that was a pale imitation of failed and reactionary schemes already tried by the Tories and the Clinton administration. There was no new deal. "A Budget for the people", said the Independent's front page over a drawing of Brown dressed as Oliver Cromwell. This was difficult to fathom. Apart from a few crumbs for the health service and education, and windfall taxes on utilities, which their huge profits easily absorbed, Brown's first budget was from the extreme right, making his Tory predecessor look Keynesian. That was unmentionable, and still is.

Most Labour voters had endured 18 years of cuts in education, social security, disability and other benefits – yet Brown reversed not a single one of them, including a tax base that allows the likes of Rupert Murdoch to avoid paying tens of millions of pounds to the Treasury. Today, nothing essentially has changed. One in four Britons is still born into poverty – a poverty that has hardened under Blair and Brown and remains the chief cause of higher rates of ill health, accidents and deaths in infancy, school exclusion and low educational performance.

"The New Special Relationship" was the next good news, with Blair and Clinton looking into each other's eyes in the garden at No 10 Downing Street. Here was the torch being passed, said the front page of the Independent, "from a becalmed and aimless American presidency to the coltish omnipotence of Blairdom". This was the reverential tone that

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launched Blair into his imperial violence. The new prime minister, wrote Hugo Young, “wants to create a world none of us has known, where the laws of political gravity are overturned”. In the age of Blair, “ideology has surrendered entirely to values... there are no sacred cows [and] no fossilised limits to the ground over which the mind might range in search of a better Britain”.

By the time Robin Cook launched his infamous mission statement, putting human rights at the “heart” of foreign policy and promising to review arms sales on “ethical” grounds, not a sceptical voice was to be heard coming from liberalism’s powerhouses. On the contrary, the Guardian counselled Blair not to be too “soft centred”. Jeremy Paxman assured his BBC audience that even if the new “ethical” policy stopped the sale of Hawk fighter-bombers to Indonesia, their presence in East Timor (where one-third of the population had perished as result of Indonesia’s illegal occupation) was “not proved”. This was the standard Foreign Office lie, which was eventually admitted by Cook.

Why did Blair go all the way with Bush? Apart from his own Messianic view of the world, the Blairite elite are part of the “Atlanticist” tradition of the party. That means imperialism. All those years of Kennedy scholarships, trade union fellowships at Harvard and fraternal seminars paid for by the US government have had their insidious effect. Five members of Blair’s first cabinet, along with his chief of staff, Jonathan Powell, were members of the British American Project for a Successor Generation, a masonry of chosen politicians and journalists, conceived by the far-right oil baron J Howard Pew and launched by Ronald Reagan and Rupert Murdoch. Blair’s invitation to Thatcher to visit him in Downing Street might have offered a pointer to what was coming. But no; dissenters were killjoys. According to Susie Orbach, the psychologist, not taking pleasure in the rise of Blairdom reflected no less than a troubled personality. “It’s as though there is something safe in negativity...” she wrote, “you often find [this state of mind] in someone who... can only fight, who can never rest from battle, may be trying to defeat inner demons, hopeless feelings, that are far too frightening to touch directly.”

The dissenters have been proved right, and right again. In six years Blair has ordered four bloody wars against and in countries that offered the British no threat, including the longest Anglo-American bombing campaign since the Second World War, against Iraq; and this was before he ordered a land invasion of a country he knew was defenceless. Andrew Gilligan will probably be pilloried by an establishment tribunal for telling a version of this truth. Lord Hutton (he who sat on the notorious “Diplock” court in Belfast) could and should have recalled Blair for cross-examination, but chose not to. This is a travesty, because the real issue is the criminality of Blair and his coterie. The truth of this is currency now, thanks to the millions who have broken an established silence, with thousands of them going into the streets for the first time and filling the letters pages and shaming the majority of Labour MPs, who chose Bush and Blair over their constituents.

They are the best of this society. They are rescuing noble concepts, such as democracy and freedom, from Blairite windbags who emptied them of their true meaning while claiming to be left of centre. Theirs is an “insurrection of subjugated knowledge”, as Vandana Shiva has written. They are the democratic opposition now, owing nothing to Westminster; and their achievements echo the American playwright Lillian Hellman who, in a letter in 1952 to the McCarthyite House Un-American Activities Committee, wrote: “I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year’s fashions.” It is this capacity for conscience that makes us human, and without millions around the world demonstrating it, Blair and Bush might well have attacked another country by now. That is still a distinct possibility, as the current fitting-up of Iran should alert us. Remember, the warmongers go to such lengths to deceive us only because they fear, as Shelley wrote, the public’s awakening:

*...like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number...
Ye are many – they are few.*

MICHAEL I. NIMAN / OCTOBER 27

The Brave New World of voting

Back in August I wrote about America's ongoing "soft coup" – arguing that military and intelligence community brass were turning against the Bush posse en masse. My theory was based on the fact that the strongest exposes written about the Bush administration last summer all cited former military and CIA officials as their primary sources. This trend has continued unabated, with current officials in Langley and the Pentagon joining their retired comrades on the Bush-bashing bandwagon. New stories come out daily about hawks and spooks defecting to the tofu brigade and telling all about how the Bush team misled the American people and plunged the nation into a needless war. And the formerly compliant media has deviated from the Bush administration script, bringing the military's anti-Bush message right into America's TV viewing pens.

That theory is based on the time-tested notion that elections can be manipulated by manipulating voters. Ultimately, however, it's not the voters that need to be manipulated. It's the votes. Manipulating the votes, the act of stealing an American election, used to sound far fetched. While we didn't always have confidence that voters would make fully informed decisions, we always assumed that their votes would at least more or less be counted. Then came Florida. And the whole quaint notion of elections got tossed out the window. The final 2000 election recount showed that Bush didn't win, but he came close enough to move in for the kill.

With calls for remediation of the nation's patchwork of antiquated elections systems, Congress enacted the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, providing \$3.9 billion in funding to put new electronic

voting machines in place by the 2006 election. Like the Patriot Act, HAVA passed on a knee jerk vote by Congress representatives who had little understanding of the ultimate ramifications of their vote.

Critics now say HAVA could usher in the end of democracy, flawed as it is. Here's the problem: With HAVA mandating new voting technology, most states are turning to computerized voting machines as the panacea for past elections woes. The new machines, however, make the 2000 election's hanging chads look like litter in a toxic landfill.

This isn't the rambling of a knee-jerk Luddite. To the contrary, I'm sitting here in a rather high-tech environment, hooked into the Internet, clicking away on a spiffy laptop under biomass-powered compact fluorescent light bulbs. The problem isn't that the new voting machines are computers. The problem is that many of them don't create any auditable trail for recounts. Worse, the software that runs them has been ruled in court to be the private property of the corporation that built the machines; hence, it cannot be examined to see if intentional or unintentional glitches are skewing the vote count. It gets worse. Many of the new elections contracts give the responsibility for counting the votes, not to elections officials, but to the companies who built and maintain the machines. In other words, the most sacred and tenuous process in our democracy, counting the votes, has been out-sourced.

Historically Americans have never trusted each other to count votes. This was evidenced in the Florida debacle as teams of inspectors from both the elephant and donkey teams pried over hanging, pregnant and dimpled chads. Most elections are carefully watched supervised by inspectors from both major parties. The Democrats might control a city or state budget, but we can't quite trust them to honor our democracy and not outright steal an election. Likewise, the Republicans might control the military budget and the Justice Department, but, likewise, we can't trust them not to vote 27 times, given to chance. This mistrust of each other, ill founded or not, is simply one more example of the checks and balances inherent in our system.

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Here's where our current corporate culture takes on mystic proportions. While our political parties will never quite come to trust each other, we have no qualms about tossing our whole system of checks and balances out the window and outsource elections to corporations operating without oversight.

The obvious question is, who are these corporations in whom we place deity-like trust. The answer is quite scary, unless of course you're an unpopular Republican president with a disdain for democracy and rapidly diminishing prospects for "re"-election.

The nation's largest election management company, Election Systems and Software (ES&S), grew out of a merger of electronic elections pioneer, American Information Systems (AIS), with other information companies. In the early 1990s, Nebraska's current Republican senator, Chuck Hagel, headed AIS. In 1996, with AIS holding the contract to count over 80% of Nebraska's votes, Hagel ran for the US Senate. One of AIS' principle investors served as Hagel's campaign finance chair. Hagel was an underdog in both the primary and general elections, but went on to win upset victories in both races, becoming the first Republican elected to the Senate from Nebraska in 24 years.

Hagel not only won, but won big, receiving a majority of the vote from every major demographic group in the state – including core Democratic voters such as Nebraska's black population, which historically never voted Republican in modern times.

In 2002, the entrenched Hagel won a landslide victory against Democrat Charlie Matulka. Questioning the size of Hagel's victory, Matulka called for a recount. This was not possible, however, since the state's contract with ES&S/AIS forbid examining the software on the machines, and the machines themselves created no auditable paper trail. Hagel's company, in essence, maintained the sole power to manage the election and certify his victory.

ES&S' primary competitor, Diebold, Inc., is the second largest and the fastest growing election management company in the US. Diebold's CEO is Republican fundraiser and Bush confidant, Wally O'Neil, a

recent visitor to Bush's crib in Crawford, Texas. According to investigative reporter Bev Harris, O'Dell and Diebold Director W.H. Timken, are both members of Bush's inner circle, serving on his "Pioneers" fundraising group.

It was in this capacity as a Republican Party honcho, that O'Neil, according to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, extorted that he was "committed to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the President next year." Democrats found the comment disturbing in light of the fact that O'Neil's company is currently bidding on a contract to manage Ohio's elections infrastructure. Diebold's biggest commercial success to date has been in the state of Georgia where they won the contract to supply voting machines and tally votes, making Georgia the first state to outsource an entire statewide election to a company using the new touch screen technology.

Shortly after Diebold took over the Georgia elections infrastructure, the Republican Party scored a series of historic upset victories in the "peach state's" 2002 elections. Foremost was the surprise defeat of Georgia's popular incumbent Democratic senator, Max Cleland. The race drew national attention since Cleland's Republican opponent, a pro-Iraq invasion activist who avoided military service in Vietnam, accused Cleland, a Vietnam veteran disabled in combat, of being unpatriotic. Election eve polls predicted that Cleland would beat his tasteless Republican rival, Saxby Chambliss, by between two and six percentage points. On election day, however, Cleland lost by seven percentage points, giving Chambliss what the national press called an "upset victory." That election, along with the earlier Nebraska race, gave Republicans control of the Senate.

For Georgians, Cleland's loss was just one act in a bizarre Election Day play. Also deposed in the same election, was Georgia's Democratic governor, Roy Barnes. Pollsters predicted he'd easily trounce his Republican rival, Sonny Purdue, by a margin of as many as 11 percentage points. On Election Day, however, Purdue went on to beat Barnes by five points, making him the first Republican governor elected in

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Georgia in 134 years.

The “upset victories” also upset political pollsters, all of whom mis-called the Georgia races by embarrassing margins of as much as 16 percentage points. Pundits quickly explained away Barnes’ loss, arguing that a surge of “angry” white male voters, upset with Barnes’ decision to remove the slavery-era Confederate emblem from Georgia’s state flag. According to the British newspaper, *The Independent*, however, there was no such demographic surge. To the contrary, black women made up the only demographic group in the state showing an increase in voter participation in the 2002 election.

The election software in Georgia, as in Nebraska, is shielded from public scrutiny by a clause in the state’s contract with Diebold. Following the election, however, investigative reporter Bev Harris learned that Diebold software engineers changed the programming in the state’s machines at least seven times leading up to the election. After the election, Diebold workers formatted the memory flash cards from the state’s voting machines, making any examination of the electoral record, no matter how limited, impossible.

In the months following the Georgia elections, critics obtained copies of the software Diebold used in that state – passing it on to software analysts for examination. According to *The Independent*, one analyst, Roxanne Jekot, found the software to be riddled with security holes. The programming was also riddled with embedded comments written by Diebold’s programmers saying things like, “This doesn’t really work” and “Not a confidence builder.” Jekot was also worried by strange commands in the program to do things such as divide a category of votes by one. The command shows how easily code can be introduced to divide or multiply votes for specific candidates.

Wired magazine reports that researchers from the Johns Hopkins University Information Security Institute found “stunning flaws” in Diebold’s Georgia program. In addition to geek taboos such as embedding security passwords into program source code, the Johns Hopkins analysts found flaws that could allow voters to vote multiple times, or

allow votes to be changed by a third party after being cast, in some cases by remote access.

Another group of analysts, working on contract for the Maryland state government, according to The Independent, found 328 software flaws, including 26 which they deemed as putting the election “at risk of compromise.”

Georgia and Nebraska haven’t cornered the market in suspect elections. They seem to be arising wherever the new electronic voting machines pop up. The odd thing is that wherever an electronically administered election defies statistical predictions, it is almost always to the favor of the Republican candidate. In Alabama, for example, a 7,000-vote tally shift threw the close gubernatorial election from the incumbent Democrat, to the Republican challenger. And again, in Alabama as in Georgia, there was no recount.

Touch screen voting machines are not inherently prone to election manipulation. Touch screen machines that generate a paper receipt, verified by the voter and stored by the machine, allow for accurate recounts. They also allow voters to examine the choice that the machine reports they made. This is important because the new machines, aside from being susceptible to tampering and malicious programming, are also error prone. One study conducted jointly by the California and Massachusetts Institutes of Technology (MIT and Caltech) found the new touch screen machines to be more error-prone than the notorious punch card machines of election 2000 fame. One major problem has to do with alignment. The spot on the screen with the candidate’s name, may not line up with the coded segments of the screen that register a vote for that candidate. Voters, in many recent touch screen elections, for example, have complained of machines that flash the opponent’s name when they try to vote for their preferred candidate.

The problem we are facing, however, is bigger than one of machines and technology. It involves a crisis of confidence brought on by a crisis of conflicts of interest. The problem is bigger than EC&C and Diebold.

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VoteHere, another major player in the emerging elections industry, is chaired by Admiral Dick Owens, a close associate of Dick Cheney and a member of the Defense Policy Board. Head of the George Bush School of Business and former CIA Director, Robert Gates, is a VoteHere director. Other election management companies have similar disturbing conflicts of interest, with connections to the current Bush administration, the Republican Party and the defense industries, as well as the Saudi royal family.

None of this indicates that elections are being stolen. But the lack of a paper trail or any system of accountability shows that, other than a quaint naïve assumption, there are no indications that they aren't. The aggressive push by an administration that seized power in a contested election to quickly expand touch screen voting certainly isn't putting concerned people at ease. And the Bush administration's recent move awarding a contract overseeing Internet absentee voting to a former Arthur Anderson (as in Enron accounting scandal) subsidiary also is disquieting. Despite the fact that a government which has shown its disdain for democracy is awarding vote counting contracts to a company formerly part of a firm involved in falsifying accounting records, it's politically incorrect to raise this issue in this country – and hence, the mainstream media has thus far ignored what the global media is hailing as the potential collapse of American democracy.

There is hope, however, embodied in a congressional bill popularly called the Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act of 2003 (H.R. 2239). The bill requires voting machine manufacturers to allow software to be inspected, and mandates that the machines create a voter audited paper trail. Voters should contact their representatives and register support for this bill.

GEORGE MONBIOT / OCTOBER 28

Tony Blair's new friend

The British and US governments gave three reasons for going to war with Iraq. The first was to extend the war on terrorism. The second was to destroy its weapons of mass destruction before they could be deployed. The third was to remove a brutal regime, which had tortured and murdered its people.

If the purpose of the war was to defeat terrorism, it has failed. Before the invasion, there was no demonstrable link between al-Qaida and Iraq. Today, al-Qaida appears to have moved into that country, to exploit a new range of accessible western targets. If the purpose of the war was to destroy Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction before he deployed them, then, as no such weapons appear to have existed, it was a war without moral or strategic justification.

So just one excuse remains, and it is a powerful one. Saddam Hussein was a brutal tyrant. While there was no legal argument for forcibly deposing him on the grounds of his abuse of human rights, there was a moral argument. It is one which our prime minister made repeatedly and forcefully. "The moral case against war has a moral answer: it is the moral case for removing Saddam," Tony Blair told the Labour party's spring conference in February. "Ridding the world of Saddam would be an act of humanity. It is leaving him there that is in truth inhumane."

Had millions of British people not accepted this argument, Tony Blair might not be prime minister today. There were many, especially in the Labour party, who disagreed with his decision but who did not doubt the sincerity of his belief in the primacy of human rights. There is just one test of this sincerity, and that is the consistency with which

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his concern for human rights guides his foreign policy. If he cares so much about the welfare of foreigners that he is prepared to go to war on their behalf, we should expect to see this concern reflected in all his relations with the governments of other countries. We should expect him, for example, to do all he can to help the people of Uzbekistan.

There are over 6,000 political and religious prisoners in Uzbekistan. Every year, some of them are tortured to death. Sometimes the policemen or intelligence agents simply break their fingers, their ribs and then their skulls with hammers, or stab them with screwdrivers, or rip off bits of skin and flesh with pliers, or drive needles under their fingernails, or leave them standing for a fortnight, up to their knees in freezing water. Sometimes they are a little more inventive. The body of one prisoner was delivered to his relatives last year, with a curious red tide-mark around the middle of his torso. He had been boiled to death.

His crime, like that of many of the country's prisoners, was practising his religion. Islam Karimov, the president of Uzbekistan, learned his politics in the Soviet Union. He was appointed under the old system, and its collapse in 1991 did not interrupt his rule. An Islamist terrorist network has been operating there, but Karimov makes no distinction between peaceful Muslims and terrorists: anyone who worships privately, who does not praise the president during his prayers or who joins an organisation which has not been approved by the state can be imprisoned. Political dissidents, human rights activists and homosexuals receive the same treatment. Some of them, like in the old Soviet Union, are sent to psychiatric hospitals.

But Uzbekistan is seen by the US government as a key western asset, as Saddam Hussein's Iraq once was. Since 1999, US special forces have been training Karimov's soldiers. In October 2001, he gave the United States permission to use Uzbekistan as an airbase for its war against the Taliban. The Taliban have now been overthrown, but the US has no intention of moving out. Uzbekistan is in the middle of central Asia's massive gas and oil fields. It is a nation for whose favours both Russia and China have been vying. Like Saddam Hussein's Iraq, it

is a secular state fending off the forces of Islam.

So, far from seeking to isolate his regime, the US government has tripled its aid to Karimov. Last year, he received \$500m (£300m), of which \$79m went to the police and intelligence services, who are responsible for most of the torture. While the US claims that its engagement with Karimov will encourage him to respect human rights, like Saddam Hussein he recognises that the protection of the world's most powerful government permits him to do whatever he wants. Indeed, the US state department now plays a major role in excusing his crimes. In May, for example, it announced that Uzbekistan had made "substantial and continuing progress" in improving its human rights record. The progress? "Average sentencing" for members of peaceful religious organisations is now just "7-12 years", while two years ago they were "usually sentenced to 12-19 years".

There is little question that the power and longevity of Karimov's government has been enhanced by his special relationship with the United States. There is also little question that supporting him is a dangerous game. All the principal enemies of the US today were fostered by the US or its allies in the past: the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Wahhabi zealots in Saudi Arabia, Saddam Hussein and his people in Iraq. Dictators do not have friends, only sources of power. They will shift their allegiances as their requirement for power demands. The US supported Islamist extremists in Afghanistan in order to undermine the Soviet Union, and created a monster. Now it is supporting a Soviet-era leader to undermine Islamist extremists, and building up another one.

So what of Tony Blair, the man who claims that human rights are so important that they justify going to war? Well, at the beginning of this year, he granted Uzbekistan an open licence to import whatever weapons from the United Kingdom Mr Karimov fancies. But his support goes far beyond that. The British ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, has repeatedly criticised Karimov's crushing of democracy movements and his use of torture to silence his opponents. Like Roger

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Casement, the foreign office envoy who exposed the atrocities in the Congo a century ago, Murray has been sending home dossiers which could scarcely fail to move anyone who cares about human rights.

Blair has been moved all right: moved to do everything he could to silence our ambassador. Mr Murray has been threatened with the sack, investigated for a series of plainly trumped-up charges and persecuted so relentlessly by his superiors that he had to spend some time, like many of Karimov's critics, in a psychiatric ward, though in this case for sound clinical reasons. This pressure, according to a senior government source, was partly "exercised on the orders of No 10".

In April, Blair told us that he had decided that "to leave Iraq in its brutalised state under Saddam was wrong". How much credibility does this statement now command, when the same man believes that to help Uzbekistan remain in its brutalised state is right?

November

GEORGE MONBIOT / NOVEMBER 4

Acceptable hatred

Imagine an English village building an effigy of a car, with caricatures of black people in the windows and the number plate “NIGGER”, and burning it in a public ceremony. Then imagine one of Britain’s most socially conscious MPs appearing to suggest that black people were partly to blame for the way they had been portrayed.

It is, or so we should hope, unimaginable. But something very much like it happened last week. The good burghers of Firle, in Sussex, built a mock caravan, painted a Gypsy family in the windows, added the numberplate “PIKEY” (a derogatory name for Gypsies which derives from the turnpike roads they travelled) and the words “Do As You Likey Driveways Ltd - guaranteed to rip you off”, then metaphorically purged themselves of this community by incinerating it. Their MP, the Liberal Democrat Norman Baker, later told BBC South East that “there is an issue about the rights of travellers which has to be respected, but also the duty’s on travellers to ensure that they treat the areas in which they are living with respect ... That did not happen in Firle earlier this year which is why the Bonfire Society has taken the act that they have.”

Racism towards Gypsies is acceptable in public life in Britain. Last month the Now Show on Radio 4 satirised “pikeys” running fairgrounds “with no safety documents”. It would surely never crack jokes about “pakis” or “yids”, or suggest that members of another ethnic group typically engage in dodgy business practices. When Jack Straw was home secretary he characterised Gypsies as people who “think that it’s perfectly OK for them to cause mayhem in an area, to go bur-gling, thieving, breaking into vehicles, causing all kinds of other trouble including defecating in the doorways of firms and so on”.

Now all these people would doubtless claim that they are attacking

not a race but a lifestyle. Jack Straw, for example, explained that he was not talking about “real Romany Gypsies ... who seem to mind their own business and don’t cause trouble” but about “people who masquerade as travellers or Gypsies”. It is, of course, true that not all traditional travellers are ethnic Roma, and not all Roma are travellers. But the same could be said of Judaism, which embraces both an ethnicity and a religious culture. We recognise that there is no moral distinction between attacks on Jews by people who object to their way of life and attacks on Jews by people who object to their race. We also recognise that racism is a matter of characterising a community by the behaviour of some of its members.

The persecution of Gypsies has often been accompanied by questions, like Straw’s, about their authenticity. In 1554, a British law explained that people calling themselves Aegyptians were in fact “false vagabonds”, and condemned them to death. The report on the “Gypsy question” presented to Heinrich Himmler, which recommended their confinement to labour camps, asserted that “most Gypsies are not Gypsies at all” but “the products of matings with the German criminal asocial proletariat”.

One might have hoped for a particular sensitivity about the rights of traditional travellers. Between a quarter and half a million Gypsies were killed during the Holocaust: in many parts of Europe, the Nazis almost succeeded in eliminating them. Throughout eastern Europe, the Roma are still denied employment, herded into ghettos and beaten to death by skinheads. In Britain, some 67% of traditional travellers’ sites were closed between 1986 and 1993. In 1994, the government released local authorities from the duty to provide sites for travellers and introduced new laws penalising people who stopped without permission. In one act of parliament, it effectively destroyed their way of life.

So why, despite so much evidence of persecution, are expressions of hatred towards Gypsies still acceptable in public discourse? Part of the reason is surely that they are trapped in a vicious circle: excluded from public life by racism, they are poorly placed to defend themselves

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against it. But it seems to me that there might be something else at work as well, the residue of a deeper and much older detestation.

The conflict between settled and travelling peoples goes back at least to the time of Cain and Abel. Cain was a farmer, a settled person; Abel was a herder: a nomad. Cain killed Abel because Abel was the beloved of God. The people who wrote the Old Testament were nomads who had recently settled, and who looked back with longing to the lives of their ancestors. The prophets' constant theme was the corruption of the cities and the purity of life in the wilderness, to which they kept returning. All the great monotheisms were founded by nomads: unlike settled peoples they had no fixed places in which to invest parochial spirits.

Yet the city, despite the execration of the prophets, won. Civilisation, from the Latin *civis*, a townsman, means the culture of those whose homes do not move. The horde, from the Turkish *ordu*, a camp and its people, is its antithesis. It both defines civilisation and threatens it. We fear people whose mobility makes them hard for our settled systems of government to control. But, like Cain, we also appear to hate them for something we perceive them to possess: the freedom, perhaps, which the prophets craved.

Of course, today the settled people are often more mobile than the traditional travellers. Across eastern Europe, Gypsies have been sedentarised by decree; in Britain they have been settled by the enclosure of their stopping places. Many of the Gypsies who travel across Europe today do so because they have been driven from their homes: Queen Mary's "pretended Aegyptians" have been transformed into "bogus asylum seekers".

Yet, as our continued romanticisation of the Gypsy, or bohemian, life suggests, we appear to suffer still from a residual envy. We are a migratory people (our ancestors, in the savannahs of East Africa, were forced to move from place to place as the rain moved on) with the brains, the legs, the senses of creatures who were designed never to stay still. The lives of those we associate with perpetual movement often appear

(whatever the reality may be) to be more desirable than our own. When the starving traveller in Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Crossing* arrives in town, the people there "beheld what they envied most and what they most reviled. If their hearts went out to him it was yet true that for very small cause they might also have killed him."

Envy lies at the root of racism. Racists associate Jews with money and black people with sexual power, but our hatred of Gypsies may arise from a still deeper grievance, the envy of a people whose instinct for continual movement is frustrated by the constraints of the hum-drum settled life. We wish, like Cain, to rise up and slay our brother, as the horde, not the civilised, are the beloved of the God of our creation. Could it be that it remains acceptable to hate Gypsies because it remains acceptable to romanticise them?

NORMAN SOLOMON / NOVEMBER 20

Linking Iraq occupation with the 'War on Terror'

Reuters is one of the more independent wire services. So, a recent news story from Reuters – flatly describing American military activities in Iraq as part of “the broader U.S. war on terrorism” – is a barometer of how powerfully the pressure systems of rhetoric from top U.S. officials have swayed mainstream news coverage.

Such reporting, with the matter-of-fact message that the Pentagon is fighting a “war on terrorism” in Iraq, amounts to a big journalistic gift for the Bush administration, which is determined to spin its way past the obvious downsides of the occupation.

Here are the concluding words from Bush’s point man in Iraq, Paul Bremer, during a Nov. 17 interview on NPR’s “Morning Edition” program: “The president was absolutely firm both in private and in public that he is not going to let any other issues distract us from achieving our goals here in Iraq, that we will stay here until the job is done and that the force levels will be determined by the conditions on the ground and the war on terrorism.”

Within hours, many of Bremer’s supervisors were singing from the same political hymnal:

* On a visit to Europe, Colin Powell told a French newspaper that “Afghanistan and Iraq are two theaters in the global war on terrorism.”

* In Washington, President Bush said: “We fully recognize that Iraq has become a new front on the war on terror.

* Speaking to campaign contributors in Buffalo, the vice president pushed the envelope of deception. “Iraq is now the central front in the war on terror,” Dick Cheney declared.

Whether you’re selling food from McDonald’s or cars from General

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Motors or a war from the U.S. government, repetition is crucial for making propaganda stick. Bush's promoters will never tire of depicting the war on Iraq as a war on terrorism. And they certainly appreciate the ongoing assists from news media.

For the U.S. public, the mythological link between the occupation of Iraq and the "war on terrorism" is in play. This fall, repeated polling has found a consistent breakout of opinion. In mid-November, according to a CBS News poll, 46 percent of respondents said that the war in Iraq is a major part of the "war on terrorism," while 14 percent called it a minor part and 35 percent saw them as two separate matters.

A shift in such perceptions, one way or another, could be crucial for Bush's election hopes. In large measure – particularly at psychological levels – Bush sold the invasion of Iraq as a move against "terrorism." If he succeeds at framing the occupation as such, he'll get a big boost toward a second term.

Despite the Bush administration's countless efforts to imply or directly assert otherwise, no credible evidence has ever emerged to link 9/11 or Al Qaeda with the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Now, if "terrorism" is going to be used as an umbrella term so large that it covers attacks on military troops occupying a country, then the word becomes nothing more than an instrument of propaganda.

Often the coverage in U.S. news media sanitizes the human consequences – and yes, the terror – of routine actions by the occupiers. On Nov. 19, the U.S. military announced that it had dropped a pair of 2,000-pound bombs 30 miles northeast of Baghdad. Meanwhile, to the north, near the city of Kirkuk, the U.S. Air Force used 1,000-pound bombs – against "terrorist targets," an American officer told reporters.

Clearly, the vast majority of the people dying in these attacks are Iraqis who are no more "terrorists" than many Americans would be if foreign troops were occupying the United States. But U.S. news outlets sometimes go into raptures of praise as they describe the high-tech arsenal of the occupiers.

On Nov. 17, at the top of the front page of the New York Times, a

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color photo showed a gunner aiming his formidable weapon downward from a Black Hawk helicopter, airborne over Baghdad. Underneath the picture was an article lamenting the recent setbacks in Iraq for such U.S. military aircraft. “In two weeks,” the article said, “the Black Hawks and Chinooks and Apaches that once zoomed overhead with such grace and panache have suddenly become vulnerable.”

“Grace” and “panache.” Attributed to no one, the words appeared in a prominent mash note about machinery of death from the New York Times, a newspaper that’s supposed to epitomize the highest journalistic standards. But don’t hold your breath for a correction to appear in the nation’s paper of record.

JOHN PILGER / NOVEMBER 22

Bush and Blair are in trouble

Shortly before the disastrous Bush visit to Britain, Tony Blair was at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. It was an unusual glimpse of a state killer whose effete respectability has gone. His perfunctory nod to “the glorious dead” came from a face bleak with guilt. As William Howard Russell of the Times wrote of another prime minister responsible for the carnage in the Crimea, “He carries himself like one with blood on his hands.” Having shown his studied respect to the Queen, whose prerogative allowed him to commit his crime in Iraq, Blair hurried away. “Sneak home and pray you’ll never know,” wrote Siegfried Sassoon in 1917, “The hell where youth and laughter go.”

Blair must know his game is over. Bush’s reception in Britain demonstrated that; and the CIA has now announced that the Iraqi resistance is “broad, strong and getting stronger”, with numbers estimated at 50,000. “We could lose this situation,” says a report to the White House. The goal now is to “plan the endgame”.

Their lying has finally become satire. Bush told David Frost that the world really had to change its attitude about Saddam Hussein’s nuclear weapons because they were “very advanced”. My personal favourite is Donald Rumsfeld’s assessment. “The message,” he said, “is that there are known knowns – there are things that we know that we know. There are known unknowns – that is to say, there are things that we now know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns ... things we do not know we don’t know. And each year we discover a few more of those unknown unknowns.”

An unprecedented gathering of senior American intelligence officers, diplomats and former Pentagon officials met in Washington the other

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day to say, in the words of Ray McGovern, a former CIA analyst and friend of Bush's father: "Now we know that no other president of the United States has ever lied so baldly and so often and so demonstrably ... The presumption now has to be that he's lying any time that he's saying anything."

And Blair and his foreign secretary dare to suggest that the millions who have rumbled the Bush gang are "fashionably anti-American". An instructive example of their own mendacity was demonstrated recently by Jack Straw. On BBC Radio 4, defending Bush and Washington's doctrine of "preventive war", Straw told the interviewer: "Article 51 [of the United Nations Charter], to which you referred earlier – you said it only allows for self-defence. It actually goes more widely than that because it talks about the right of states to take what is called 'preventive action'."

Straw's every word was false, an invention. Article 51 does not refer to "the right of states to take preventive action" or anything similar. Nowhere in the UN Charter is there any such reference. Article 51 refers only to "the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs" and goes on to constrain that right further. Moreover, the UN Charter was so framed as to outlaw any state's claimed right to preventive war.

In other words, the Foreign Secretary fabricated a provision of the UN Charter which does not exist, then broadcast it as fact. When Straw does speak the truth, it causes panic. The other day, he admitted that Bush had shut him out of critical talks in Washington with Paul Bremer, the US viceroy in Iraq. Straw said he was "not party to the talks, not a party to his [Bremer's] return visit". The Foreign Office transcript of this leaves out that Straw had complained that "the UK and US [are] literally the occupying powers, and we have to meet those responsibilities". The US disregard for its principal vassal has never been clearer.

Both are now desperate. The Bush regime's panic is reflected in its adoption of Israeli revenge tactics, using F-16 aircraft to drop 500lb

bombs on residential areas called “suspect zones”. They are also burning crops: another Israeli tactic. The parallels are now Palestine and Vietnam; more Americans have died in Iraq than in the first three years of the Vietnam war.

For Bush and Blair, no recourse to the “bravery” of “our wonderful troops” will work its populist magic now. “My husband died in vain,” read the headline in the Independent on Sunday. Lianne Seymour, widow of the commando Ian Seymour, said: “They misled the guys going out there. You can’t just do something wrong and hope you find a good reason for it later.” The moral logic of her words is shared by the majority of the British people, if not by Blair’s diminishing court. How decrepit the Independent’s warmongering rival the Observer now appears, with its pages of titillation and hand-wringing, having seen off a proud liberal tradition.

“Out there”, the Iraqi dead and suffering are still unpeople, their latest death toll not worthy of the front page. Neither is the Amnesty report that former Iraqi prisoners of war have accused American and British troops of torturing them in custody, blindfolding them and kicking and beating them with weapons for long periods. Investigators from Amnesty have taken statements from 20 former prisoners. “In one case we are talking about electric shocks being used against a man ... If you keep beating somebody for the whole night and somebody is bleeding and you are breaking teeth, it is more than beating,” said Amnesty’s researcher, “I think that’s torture.” The Americans hold more than 4,000 prisoners – a higher figure, it is estimated, than those incarcerated at any time by Saddam Hussein.

With Bush in London, Baroness Symons, a Foreign Office minister, postponed a long-planned meeting with families of British citizens held in the American concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. She has made a habit of this. The families and their lawyers want to ask questions about the alleged use of torture, the deteriorating mental health of prisoners and the criminalising of the Muslim community in Britain. Held for two years without any due process, these British citi-

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zens have had their rights relegated to the convenience of the American warlord.

Blair's troubles are only beginning. There are signs that the Shia storm is gathering in southern Iraq, an area for which the British are responsible. A Shia underground army is said to be forming, quietly and patiently, as it did under the shah of Iran. If or when they rise, there will be a great deal more British blood on the Prime Minister's hands.

For 11 November, Remembrance Day, Hywel Williams wrote movingly in the Guardian about the exploitation of "the usable past – something that can be packaged into propaganda ... [by those] with careers to build and their own causes to advance ... We are now a country draped in the weeds of war ... The remembrance we endure now is no longer a seasonal affair. It is a continuous festival of death as individual souls are press-ganged into the justification of all British-American wars. To this sorrow there seems no end."

Yes, but only if we allow it.

December

JOHN PILGER / DECEMBER 4

The BBC and Iraq: Myth and reality

Greg Dyke, the BBC's director general, has attacked American television reporting of Iraq. "For any news organisation to act as a cheerleader for government is to undermine your credibility," he said. "They should be... balancing their coverage, not banging the drum for one side or the other." He said research showed that, of 840 experts interviewed on American news programmes during the invasion of Iraq, only four opposed the war. "If that were true in Britain, the BBC would have failed in its duty."

Did Dyke say all this with a straight face? Let's look at what research shows about the BBC's reporting of Iraq. Media Tenor, the non-partisan, Bonn-based media research organisation, has examined the Iraq war reporting of some of the world's leading broadcasters, including the US networks and the BBC. It concentrated on the coverage of opposition to the war.

The second-worst case of denying access to anti-war voices was ABC in the United States, which allowed them a mere 7 per cent of its overall coverage. The worst case was the BBC, which gave just 2 per cent of its coverage to opposition views - views that represented those of the majority of the British people. A separate study by Cardiff University came to the same conclusion. The BBC, it said, had "displayed the most pro-war agenda of any [British] broadcaster".

Consider the first Newsnight broadcast after the greatest political demonstration in British history on 15 February. The studio discussion was confined to interviews with a Tory member of the House of Lords, a Tory MP, an Oxford don, an LSE professor, a commentator from the Times and the views of the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw. Not one

marcher was invited to participate, not one representative of the two million who had filled London in protest. Instead, a political reporter, David Grossman, asked perversely: “What about the millions who didn’t march? Was going to the DIY store or watching the football on Saturday a demonstration of support for the government?”

A constant theme of the BBC’s Iraq coverage is that Anglo-American policy, although capable of “blunders”, is essentially benign, even noble. Thus, amazingly, Matt Frei, the BBC’s Washington correspondent, declared on 13 April: “There’s no doubt that the desire to bring good, to bring American values to the rest of the world, and especially now to the Middle East... is now increasingly tied up with military power.” The same “good” military power had just slaughtered at least 15,000 people in an illegal, unprovoked attack on a largely defenceless country.

No doubt touched by this goodness, Newsnight’s Kirsty Wark asked General Sir Mike Jackson, Chief of the General Staff, if “coalition” troops “are really powerless to help civilians targeted by Iraqi forces in Basra”. Clearly, she felt no need to check the veracity of the British claim that Iraqi forces had been targeting civilians in Basra, a claim that proved to be baseless propaganda.

During the bombing of Serbia in 1999, Wark interviewed another general, Wesley Clark, the Nato commander. The Serbian city of Nis had just been sprayed with American cluster bombs, killing women, old people and children caught in the open: the horrific handiwork of one of Nato’s “precision-guided” missiles, of which only 2 per cent hit military targets. Wark asked not a single question about this, or about any civilian deaths.

These are not isolated examples, but the BBC “style”. What matters is that the received wisdom dominates and is protected. When a US missile killed 62 people at a market in Baghdad, BBC News affected a fake “who can tell who’s responsible?” neutrality, a standard technique when the atrocity is “ours”. On Newsnight, a BBC commentator dismissed the carnage with these words: “It’s a war after all... But the

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coalition aim is to unseat Saddam Hussein by winning hearts and minds.” His voice trailed over images of grieving relatives.

Regardless of the spat over Andrew Gilligan’s attempt to tell the truth about the Blair government’s lying, the BBC’s amplifying of government lies about a “threat” from Iraq was routine. Typically on 7 January, BBC1’s 6pm news bulletin reported that British army reservists were being called up “to deal with the continuing threat posed by Iraq”. What threat?

During the 1991 Gulf war, BBC audiences were told incessantly about “surgical strikes” so precise that war had become almost a bloodless science. David Dimbleby asked the US ambassador: “Isn’t it in fact true that America, by dint of the very accuracy of the weapons we’ve seen, is the only potential world policeman?”

Dimbleby, like his news colleagues, had been conned; most of the weapons had missed their military targets and killed civilians.

In 1991, according to the Guardian, the BBC told its broadcasters to be “circumspect” about pictures of civilian death and injury. This may explain why the BBC offered us only glimpses of the horrific truth – that the Americans were systematically targeting civilian infrastructure and conducting a one-sided slaughter. Shortly before Christmas 1991, the Medical Education Trust in London estimated that more than 200,000 Iraqi men, women and children had died in the “surgical” assault and its immediate aftermath.

An archive search has failed to turn up a single BBC item reporting this. Similarly, a search of the BBC’s coverage of the causes and effects of the 13-year embargo on Iraq has failed to produce a single report spelling out that which Madeleine Albright, Bill Clinton’s secretary of state, put so succinctly when asked if the deaths of half a million children were a price worth paying for sanctions. “We think the price is worth it,” she replied.

There was plenty of vilifying of the “Beast of Baghdad”, but nothing on the fact that, up to July 2002, the United States was deliberately blocking more than \$5bn worth of humanitarian and reconstruction

aid reaching Iraq – aid approved by the UN Security Council and paid for by Iraq. I recently asked a well-known BBC correspondent about this, and he replied: “I’ve tried, but they’re not interested.”

There are honourable exceptions to all this, of course; but just as BBC production values have few equals, so do its self-serving myths about objectivity, impartiality and balance have few equals – myths that have demonstrated their stamina since the 1920s, when John Reith, the BBC’s first director general, secretly wrote propaganda for the Tory Baldwin government during the General Strike and noted in his diaries that impartiality was a principle to be suspended whenever the established order and its consensus were threatened.

Thus, *The War Game*, Peter Watkins’s brilliant film for the BBC about the effects of a nuclear attack on Britain, was suppressed for 20 years. In 1965, the chairman of the BBC’s board of governors, Lord Normanbrook, secretly warned the Wilson government that “the showing of the film on television might have a significant effect on public attitudes towards the policy of the nuclear deterrent”.

Generally speaking, outright bans are unnecessary, because “going too far”, which Watkins did, is discouraged by background and training. That the BBC, like most of the Anglo-American media, reports the fate of whole societies according to their usefulness to “us”, the euphemism for western power, and works diligently to minimise the culpability of British governments in great crimes, is self-evident and certainly unconspiratorial. It is simply part of a rich tradition.

NORMAN SOLOMON / DECEMBER 14

Prosecuted for telling the truth

Few Americans have heard of Katharine Gun, a former British intelligence employee facing charges that she violated the Official Secrets Act. So far, the American press has ignored her. But the case raises profound questions about democracy and the public's right to know on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ms. Gun's legal peril began in Britain on March 2, when the Observer newspaper exposed a highly secret memorandum by a top U.S. National Security Agency official. Dated Jan. 31, the memo outlined surveillance of a half-dozen delegations with swing votes on the U.N. Security Council, noting a focus on "the whole gamut of information that could give U.S. policy-makers an edge in obtaining results favorable to U.S. goals" – support for war on Iraq.

The NSA memo said that the agency had started a "surge" of spying on diplomats at the United Nations in New York, including wiretaps of home and office telephones along with reading of e-mails. The targets were delegations from six countries considered to be pivotal – Mexico, Chile, Angola, Cameroon, Guinea and Pakistan – for the war resolution being promoted by the United States and Britain.

The scoop caused headlines in much of the world, and sparked a furor in the "Middle Six" countries. The U.S. government and its British ally – revealed to be colluding in the U.N. surveillance caper – were put on the defensive.

A few days after the story broke, I contacted the man responsible for leaking the huge trove of secret documents about the Vietnam War known as the Pentagon Papers more than three decades ago. What was his assessment of the U.N. spying memo?

"This leak," Daniel Ellsberg replied, "is more timely and potentially

more important than the Pentagon Papers.” The exposure of the memo, he said, had the potential to block the invasion of Iraq before it began: “Truth-telling like this can stop a war.”

Katharine Gun’s truth-telling did not stop the war on Iraq, but it did make a difference. Some analysts cite the uproar from the leaked memo as a key factor in the U.S.-British failure to get Security Council approval of a pro-war resolution before the invasion began in late March.

The government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair quickly arrested Ms. Gun. In June, she formally lost her job as a translator at the top-secret Government Communications Headquarters in Gloucester. On Nov. 13, her name surfaced in the British news media when the Labor Party government dropped the other shoe, charging the 29-year-old woman with a breach of the Official Secrets Act.

She faces up to two years in prison if convicted.

Ms. Gun, who is free on bail and is to appear in court Jan. 19, has responded with measured eloquence. Disclosure of the NSA memo, she said Nov. 27, was “necessary to prevent an illegal war in which thousands of Iraqi civilians and British soldiers would be killed or maimed.” And Ms. Gun reiterated something that she had said two weeks earlier: “I have only ever followed my conscience.”

All the realpolitik in the world cannot preclude the exercise of the internal quality that most distinguishes human beings. Of all the differences between people and other animals, Charles Darwin observed, “the moral sense of conscience is by far the most important.”

In this case, Ms. Gun’s conscience fully intersected with the needs of democracy and a free press. The British and American people had every right to know that their governments were involved in a high-stakes dirty tricks campaign at the United Nations. For democratic societies, a timely flow of information is the lifeblood of the body politic.

As it happened, the illegal bugging of diplomats from three continents in Manhattan foreshadowed the illegality of the war that was to

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come. Shortly before the invasion began, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed out that – in the absence of an authorizing resolution from the Security Council – an attack on Iraq would violate the U.N. Charter.

Ms. Gun’s conspicuous bravery speaks louder than any rhetoric possibly could. Her actions confront Britons and Americans alike with difficult choices:

To what extent is the “special relationship” between the two countries to be based on democracy or duplicity? How much do we treasure the substance of civil liberties that make authentic public discourse distinct from the hollowness of secrecy and manipulation? How badly do we want to know what is being done in our names with our tax money? And why is it so rare that conscience takes precedence over expediency?

GEORGE MONBIOT / DECEMBER 16

A weapon with wings

They will probably be commemorating the wrong people in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, tomorrow. Five months before the Wright brothers lifted a flying machine into the air for 12 seconds above the sand dunes of the Outer Banks, the New Zealander Richard Pearse had travelled for more than a kilometre in his contraption, without the help of ramps or slides, and had even managed to turn his plane in mid-flight.

But history belongs to those who record it, so tomorrow is the official centenary of the aeroplane. At Kitty Hawk, George Bush will deliver a eulogy to aviation, while a number of men with more money than sense will seek to recreate the Wrights' first flight. Well, they can keep their anniversary. Tomorrow should be a day of international mourning. December 17 2003 is the centenary of the world's most effective killing machine.

The aeroplane was not the first weapon of mass destruction. The European powers had already learned to rain terror upon their colonial subjects by means of naval bombardment, artillery and the Gatling and Maxim guns. But the destructive potential of aerial bombing was grasped even before the first plane left the ground. In 1886, Jules Verne imagined aircraft acting as a global police force, bombing barbaric races into peace and civilisation. In 1898, the novelist Samuel Odell saw the English-speaking peoples subjugating eastern Europe and Asia by means of aerial bombardment. In the same year, the writer Stanley Waterloo celebrated the future annihilation of inferior races from the air.

None of this was lost on the Wright brothers. When Wilbur Wright was asked, in 1905, what the purpose of his machine might be, he answered simply: "War." As soon as they were confident that the technology worked, the brothers approached the war offices of several

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nations, hoping to sell their patent to the highest bidder. The US government bought it for \$30,000, and started test bombing in 1910. The aeroplane was conceived, designed, tested, developed and sold, in other words, not as a vehicle for tourism, but as an instrument of destruction.

In November 1911, eight years after the first flight, the Italian army carried out the first bombing raid, on a settlement outside Tripoli. Then as now, aerial bombardment was seen as a means of civilising uncooperative peoples. As Sven Lindqvist records in *A History of Bombing*, the imperial powers experimented freely with civilisation from the skies. Just as the Holocaust was prefigured by colonial genocide, so the bombing raids which reduced Guernica, Hamburg, Dresden, Tokyo and parts of London to ash had been rehearsed in north Africa and the Middle East.

As the enemy was reduced to a distant target in an inferior sphere, greater cruelties could be engineered than any effected before. The British knew what they were doing in Germany. Directive 22 to Bomber Command in 1942 ordered that the “aiming points” for fire-bombing be “built-up areas, not, for instance, the dockyards or aircraft factories”. The Americans knew what they were doing in Japan. Major General Curtis LeMay, who incinerated 100,000 civilians in Tokyo, admitted: “We knew we were going to kill a lot of women and kids when we burned that town. Had to be done.” Japan sought to negotiate peace, but the Allies refused to talk until they had taken their firebombing to its logical conclusion, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. LeMay later became chief of staff of the US airforce. He was the man who, in 1964, promised to bomb Vietnam back into the stone age.

I doubt much mention will be made of all this at the centenary celebrations tomorrow. Instead we will be encouraged to concentrate upon the civil applications of this military technology. We will be told how the aeroplane has made the world a smaller place, how it has brought people closer together, fostering understanding and friendship. There is something in this: the people of powerful nations might

be reluctant to permit their leaders to destroy the countries they have visited. But commercial flights, like military flights, are an instrument of domination. As tourists, we engage with the people of other nations on our own terms. The world's administrators can flit from place to place enforcing their mandate. The corporate jet-set shrinks the earth to fit its needs. Those with access to the aeroplane control the world.

The men who attacked New York and Washington on September 11 2001 drove one symbol of power into another. The aeroplane, more precisely than any other technology, represents the global ruling class. In the past we raised our eyes to the men on horseback. Today we raise our eyes to the heavens.

Those hijackers had turned the civilian product of a military technology back into a military technology, but even when used for strictly commercial purposes, the airliner remains a weapon of mass destruction. Last week the World Health Organisation calculated that climate change is causing 150,000 deaths a year. This figure excludes deaths caused by drought and famine, pests and plant diseases and conflicts over natural resources, all of which appear to be exacerbated by global warming. Flying is our most effective means of wrecking the planet: every passenger on a return journey from Britain to Florida produces more carbon dioxide than the average motorist does in a year. Every time we fly, we help to kill someone.

This morning, our government is expected to give a grand 100th birthday present to the aeroplane. Despite almost 400,000 objections to the expansion of airports in Britain, the transport secretary will announce new runways at Stansted and Birmingham, and more flights to Heathrow. This, the government hopes, will help accommodate a near-tripling of the number of journeys into and out of Britain by 2030. By then the 400,000 won't be the only ones wishing that Wilbur and Orville (if indeed they were responsible) had stuck to mending bicycles.

The \$1,000 those men spent on developing their beast is just about the only expenditure on this doom machine that has not been state-

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assisted. All over the world, the aircraft industry was built by means of government spending. All over the world, it is sustained today through tax breaks and hidden subsidies. Mysteriously exempt from both fuel duty and VAT, airlines in Britain dodge some £10bn of tax a year. The aeroplane, in other words, is still treated by governments as a social good.

This might have something to do with the fact that prime ministers and presidents use it more often than anyone else. Or it might reflect the perennial male obsession with the instruments of control.

Just as Alexander the Great worshipped his horse, George Bush, the new conqueror of Persia, will tomorrow worship the aeroplane. Our societies are built upon these technologies of war: the current world order fell from the hatches of the aeroplane. At 10.35am, North Carolina time, George Bush and the other enthusiasts for domination will bow down before it. The rest of us should observe 12 seconds of silence, in commemoration of the deeds wrought by those magnificent men in their killing machines.

MICHAEL NIMAN / DECEMBER 22

Saddam Saddam

For a second there, it looked like there'd be no Christmas this year, as televisions across the world broadcast images of US forces picking lice from a disheveled Santa's hair. It soon became apparent, however, that this was not your run-of-the-mill derelict Santa, shanghaied from his mission to the mall. No, not this guy. He looked more like a Satanic Santa morphing into a crazed Karl Marx right before our eyes. This wasn't jolly 'ol Saint Nick. This was "the evil one," or more specifically, I think, "the other evil one." I lose track sometimes. But hell, Michael Jackson move over – our holiday news hole has been filled. Saddam finally was down for the count – just in time for Christmas. I feel safe. Or is that fail safe?

As a nation, we've taken Saddam, a low life punk, and transformed him into a mythical figure. Then, seemingly for the sport of the hunt, we took him down "like a rat in a hole." I use the term "we" rather liberally here, like The Syracuse Post Standard, whose front page headline read, "We Got Him," as if Post Standard editors were there in the trenches capturing Mr. Hussein themselves.

For over a decade we've fixated on Saddam's living arrangements, from his palace toiletry (more college-aged Americans know Saddam had gold plated toilet seats, than can name their city council representative) to his seedy garden shack hideout. We know the dimensions of the grave-like hole where Post Standard editors ultimately caught him. We watched Army doctors probe his hairy face, in what the American media initially reported as a dental examination. Later, we learned that they were just swabbing for DNA, to make sure they had the right Saddam – there being six of them at last count. This was to the relief of working Americans outraged that our \$87 billion dollars were paying for Saddam's dental care, at a time when millions of working Americans are going without such "luxuries."

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In the end we collectively celebrated the moment as it dangled historically disconnected from any context. Had Saddam eluded his captors for five more days, he could have been taken into custody on the twentieth anniversary of his first Baghdad meeting with Donald Rumsfeld, then a pharmaceutical industry executive and mysterious special envoy for President Ronald Reagan.

This would have been at the height of the Iran-Iraq war, when Saddam's troops were using weapons of mass destruction made from chemical and biological toxins supplied, according to declassified US Government documents cited in a 1994 Senate report, by the United States. (These would be *Brucella Melitrensis*, *Bacillus Anthracis*, *Clostridium Perfringens*, *Clostridium Tetani*, *Clostridium Botulinum* and *Histoplasma Capsulatum*, if you must know.)

Had Saddam stayed hidden for three more months, he not only would have completed the Santa to Marx visual transformation – he could have been captured on the anniversary of Donald Rumsfeld's subsequent visit to Baghdad. This trip, according to newly declassified US government documents, was to assure the Iraqis that US public criticism of Saddam's use of chemical and biological weapons was just for show. Then Secretary of State George Shultz instructed Rumsfeld to reassure the Iraqi regime that the Reagan administration's desire to continue improving the relationship between the US and Saddam's government remained "undiminished," despite the administration's rhetorical criticism of Iraqi war crimes.

With this undiminished relationship firmly in place, the Reagan administration supplied Saddam's government with satellite images pinpointing the location of Iranian troops – troops that were being armed by the Reagan administration in what we now know as the "Iran-Contra Scandal."

Before last week's release of these documents, Rumsfeld maintained that the sole purpose of his trip was to caution the Iraqis against the use of chemical weapons – an assertion that now appears to be the polar opposite of what the documents detail as the real purpose of his

visit. To its credit, the Washington Post reported this story last Friday, December 19th. To its shame, they buried it on page A42.

The oddest thing about Saddam's recent capture was the fact that he was captured alive. For Rumsfeld and the rest of the Bush administration, this poses a problem. If Saddam is put on trial by any court other than a US puppet court, the main focus of his trial would be his quasi-genocidal attacks against the Kurdish people, and his use of chemical and biological weapons during his war with Iran. Any probing of these crimes, however, would raise questions about accomplices. Yes, Saddam will go to the big house, but he'll certainly sing all the way up river. This digression from the "we got the evil doer" script presents embarrassing problems for the Bush administration. Any legitimate court that prosecutes Saddam would want to prosecute his accomplices as well. This won't be a welcome subtext to the 2004 election story.

So the obvious question is: Why is Saddam alive? The answer might very well be that he wasn't supposed to be. We certainly heard enough Wild West rhetoric from George W. There was lots of "Dead or Alive" talk, with the emphasis on "Dead" (have you ever wondered how come it's seldom "Alive or Dead?"). All of Bush's rants about Saddam always had an almost audible murmur of, "String 'im up high, he tried to kill my pappy."

The problem of late for the Bush clan is that many high level American military and intelligence people seem to have been turning against them lately. A few months ago, I described this ongoing process as a "soft coup." Most of the incriminating intelligence data that documents how Bush lied to mislead the nation into war, for example, came directly from the CIA and the military intelligence community. Stressed-out military personnel are now going AWOL by the score while their commanders are giving interviews about the White House's flawed war plan. The military community even has, with Wesley Clark, their own presidential candidate. Now, with the live capture of Saddam, they seem to have delivered a Christmas gift to the anti-Bush forces.

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Last week's pronouncement by the Republican head of the Senate's 9/11 Commission, that the attacks against America could have been prevented, has added to Bush's woes. Taking the statements of the Commission's Bush-appointed chair at face value, it now appears that Bush's government bore more responsibility for the 9/11 attacks than did Saddam. The feds, according to the report, could have stopped the attacks from happening – hence the Bush administration bears at least some responsibility for what ultimately happened on that day. The major remaining point of contention is exactly how much responsibility they bore. By comparison, reports issued by the CIA document that Saddam had no connection to the primarily Saudi terrorists. He didn't help orchestrate the attacks and he couldn't have prevented them. In other words, Saddam bore no responsibility for what happened on 9/11, but the Bush administration probably did.

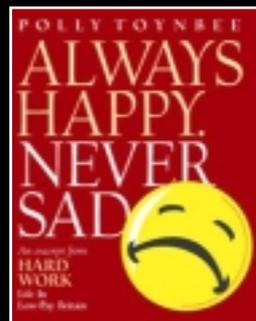
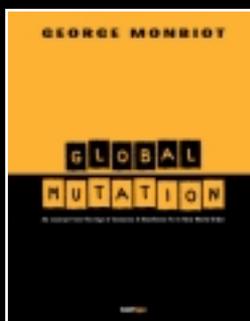
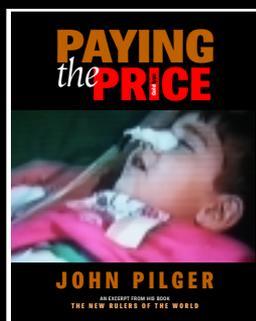
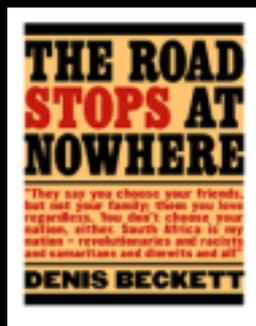
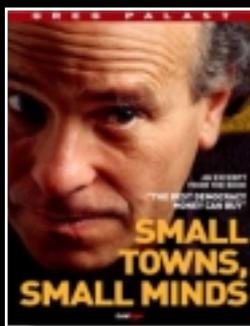
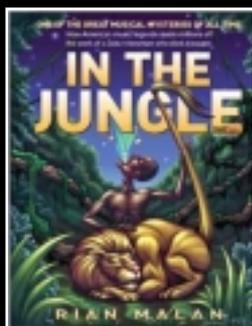
So what was this war about again? If it wasn't about weapons of mass destruction, and it wasn't about 9/11, and it wasn't about al Qaida, and it wasn't about Saddam being a maniacal tyrant, because lord knows we certainly maintain friendly relations with enough of them, then what exactly was it about? We are now about 10,000 deaths and \$100 billion down the road of war and no one can answer this lingering question. Ultimately, perhaps the voters will address it in November. That is, unless they're distracted by an October surprise – say, the capture of Osama bin Laden.

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