



Common Sense



Special Edition: ***Iraq at the Boiling Point***

News Round-Up

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American Casualties Shown to be Vastly Underestimated

Official figures now hold the number of US deaths in Iraq at 165 (a greater number than in the first Gulf War), and estimate approximately 900 wounded. But an investigation by the British paper *The Observer* reveals that there have in fact been at least 1500 wounded, with a total of 6000 US medical evacuations from Iraq. See the *Observer*, September 14, 2003
Jason Burke, Paul Harris

Returning Soldiers Face Difficult Homecoming

A *New York Times* story follows the soldiers of the First Brigade as they return home with mixed emotions and troubled relationships. The division lost 38 soldiers, and expressed disgust with "stupid people" with misconceptions about the realities of war. Many are so disturbed by their experience that they are estranged from their own families. The problems are made worse by economic problems which have left troops with few job prospects to return to. See *New York Times*, September 12, 2003
Steven Lee Myers

Veterans Groups Charge Republicans with Waging "War Against Veterans"

Republicans are seeking to place new limits on disability benefits for injured vets. Democratic Senators wrote to President Bush that the proposal would "pit one group of disabled veterans against another". The administration has already called for over \$20 billion in cuts to veterans' programs and military pay. *The Independent* in Britain now reports that the military constituency, once reliably Republican, is becoming increasingly vocal in opposition to the White House.

See *Reuters*, September 12, 2003
Independent, September 20, 2003

Bush Admits Hussein Not Linked to 9/11, Cheney Sites Multiple Bogus Claims to Support Al Qaeda Link

For the first time President Bush stated publicly that Saddam Hussein had no connection to the 9/11 attacks. Critics have claimed that the administration deliberately conflated the two, pointing to the fact that a recent poll found 70% of Americans holding an unsubstantiated belief that Hussein had a personal role in the attacks. Indeed, the *Washington Post* has documented a consistent pattern of mentioning Hussein in the context of 9/11, as well as invoking 9/11 to justify policies ranging from tax cuts to environmental deregulation.

The admission came days after a controversial appearance on *Meet the Press* in which Vice President Cheney made an extensive case for a connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. The *Washington Post* analysis of the appearance revealed that every piece of evidence used by Cheney had been previously disproven or disputed. British intelligence, the UN Al Qaeda task force, several prominent American intelligence figures, and respected legislators such as Republican John McCain have all declared that there is no evidence of any connection between the two, and that, in fact, they are perceived as ideological enemies. Osama Bin Laden, in a tape released earlier this year, referred to Saddam Hussein as an "infidel." Recent intelligence also calls average Iraqi resentment a significantly greater problem than outside terrorism in Iraq. See *AP*, September 17, 2003 *Terrence Hunt*; *Washington Post*, September 15, 2003

Former Head of Weapons Inspectors Blix Says Iraq Probably Destroyed Weapons Years Ago

Hans Blix told Australian radio "I'm certainly more and more to the conclusion that Iraq has, as they maintained, destroyed all, almost, of what they had in the summer of 1991. The more time that has passed, the more I think it's unlikely that anything will be found." The preliminary report on the weapons search was due this week, but the administration has postponed the report indefinitely, hinting that no report may ever

be released. No evidence of weapons or weapons programs has been found. See *Guardian (UK)*, September 18, 2003

Bush Approval Ratings Drop to Pre-9/11 Levels

An ABC News/ Washington Post poll found that Bush's approval rating has lost its lustre since the end of the Iraq war. Only 39% approved of his record on job creation, with 55% disapproving. Regarding the federal budget, 38% approved, with 57% disapproving. Other polls have shown declining support for his Iraq policy, with a sound majority of America disapproving of his request for \$87 billion for the reconstruction. The administration has admitted that even this amount will fall far short of meeting needs for the next year. See *ABC News*, September 14, 2003

Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz Under Fire

As criticism increases for the lack of post-war planning, many in Washington have begun to demand that Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz be held accountable. Jack Murtha, a moderate Democrat generally viewed as a "hawk", called for "heads to roll". But insiders are increasingly claiming that while Republican legislators stay quiet publicly, even they are expressing anger behind closed doors. Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz have also both come under harsh criticism for attempting to shift the rationale for war. See *International Herald-Tribune*, September 17, 2003 *David Stout*

Cleland Slams Bush

Max Cleland, a former Senator from Georgia, and triple amputee in Vietnam, has become a formidable critic of the Bush administration's foreign policy. In the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* Cleland writes: "The president has declared 'major combat over' and sent a message to every terrorist, 'Bring it on.' As a result, he has lost more people in his war than his father did in his and there is no end in sight." Cleland sees "mistakes of Vietnam repeated in Iraq". Cleland lost his seat after the administration portrayed him as "soft on homeland security" when he resisted the administration on denying workers' rights to Homeland Security Department workers. See *Atlanta Journal Constitution* August 18, 2003

Opinion

Mission Accomplished? Hardly.

A Common Sense Editorial

“Such is the irresistible nature of truth that all it asks, and all it wants, is the liberty of appearing.”-Thomas Paine

Apparently, there are some exceptions to Paine’s edict. Last Friday marked the fourth time the Washington Post has dedicated space on its front page to the startling yet intuitive intelligence finding that war with Iraq “would increase the risk of chemical and biological warfare technology or agents finding their way into the hands of terrorists”. That particular wording came from British intelligence, rounding out a consensus amongst all American and British intelligence agencies that while Saddam Hussein was in all likelihood deterrable before the war, an invasion could easily lead to exactly what Bush and Blair said they were trying to prevent. The Post reported the collective wisdom of US intelligence on July 21, 2003: “...the NIE, which began circulating Oct. 2, shows the intelligence services were much more worried that Hussein might give weapons to al Qaeda terrorists if he were facing death or capture and his government was collapsing after a military attack by the United States”.

Despite being ignored everywhere except the Post, this is nothing short of the definitive intelligence statement concerning war with Iraq. It instantly turns the

entire debate about evidence on its head. If the administration could prove that Iraq had vast stockpiles of chemical weapons (which it by no means has), all they would have proven is that there were stockpiles waiting to be shipped off to Al Qaeda the moment we took Baghdad- or before, or after. Rather than eliminating an imminent threat, the war would elevate a remote threat to the level of virtual certainty.

Was the assumption that Hussein would patiently wait for the US army to come kill or capture him, leaving his weapons scattered in hiding places across the desert for us to leisurely collect afterwards? Is it not common sense that faced with the demise of his regime, he would take that final opportunity to make use of the toys he had worked so hard for? Even if Saddam had been killed in the war, there is no reason to believe that US search units would have discovered the weapons before some Iraqi official loyal to Saddam or simply seeking to turn a quick profit with a sale to Al Qaeda. The absurdity of the national security argument for war in Iraq was that it at once claimed that Iraq represented a threat of doomsday proportions (including the deaths of “untold thousands” according to Bush), and that yet the threat had absolutely no deterrent power whatsoever. What was billed as a staunch defense of American interests was, in fact, abhorrently reckless.

And while Bush’s critics insist with increasing confidence that the entire WMD case was a fraud, and Bush and his defenders continue to argue (incredibly) that there were weapons from which

we are now safe, the truth is that the nightmare scenario envisioned by all intelligence agencies may well be upon us- and don’t think they are not worried behind closed doors. Saddam Hussein is still at large, and if there were active and usable chemical weapons they are certainly still in play and at Saddam’s disposal. The only difference is that now his desire for revenge is amplified a hundred-fold, and he cannot be deterred because he has nothing to lose. The fact that he no longer has a state to command is irrelevant, since the threat was always that he would go through terrorist channels.

That being the case, the fact that the administration shows no concern over the missing weapons is highly troubling. Rumsfeld apparently does not even think it worth discussing in his visits with David Kay (the current head of the weapons search), and the administration’s tireless cable news regurgitators, who whipped the nation into a paranoid frenzy prior to the war, now show their hollow hypocrisy by smugly declaring the threat of Saddam’s weapons eliminated.

But more generally, the fact that the importance of this central piece of intelligence (and common sense) has been missed by seemingly the entire country is a devastating commentary on the polarization blinding its citizenry. Unfortunately, facing the alternative, at this point we must all come together and hope for the best possible scenario for our national security, namely that there were no weapons and that the entire administration case was a pack of lies.