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The Myth of Omnipotence

By Dave McGowan <dave@davesweb.cnchost.com>

<http://educate-yourself.org/cn/mythofomnipotence25mar03.shtml>

March 25, 2003

I have long held the belief that the American people are not stupid, though they are decidedly ignorant. By that, I mean that the fact that Americans' collective view of the world is not grounded in any sort of objective reality is due not to the fact that Americans have no capacity for critical thought, but rather to the fact that we are deliberately deprived of the information that we need to form a coherent world view.

I must say, however, that it is getting increasingly hard to cling to that belief. After immersing myself for several days in the world of cable 'news' - an activity that I usually avoid at all costs - I have come to the conclusion that anyone who can watch this parade of fools and not know that they are being lied to has to be a few Freedom Fries short of a Happy Meal.

Lies, Lies, & More Lies

A pattern to the coverage of the Iraq war is ridiculously easy to discern: first, a recklessly transparent lie is told; then, it is repeated endlessly by a stable of resident 'experts,' apparently in an attempt to bolster its credibility; this continues until the initial claim is irrefutably revealed as a lie; at which time another layer of spin and lies is added, with no acknowledgment that the initial claim was entirely fraudulent; with the new lies

in place, the process begins again.

The certainty with which these breathtakingly brazen lies are told is truly something to behold, particularly on Fox News, where it is gleefully reported that Saddam is dead even as he continues to make regular appearances on Iraqi television. Fox has assured us in the last few days that there is no resistance in Iraq; that victory is just days, if not hours, away; that the entire country would be under U.S. control by Sunday, March 23; that Tariq Aziz has defected; that Tariq Aziz is dead; that Iraqi command and control has completely broken down; that entire divisions of the Iraqi military have already surrendered; that negotiations are underway for the surrender of the Republican Guard; that 20% of Republican Guard forces have already surrendered; that Umm

Qasr is under U.S. control; that the Faw Peninsula is under coalition control; that Basra is under U.S. control; that al Nasiriyah is under U.S. control; that virtually all of southern Iraq is under U.S. control; that the biggest problem U.S. troops are facing is how to deal logistically with mass surrenders and thousands of POWs; that there have been no POWs taken by the Iraqis, that no aircraft have been shot down or captured; that no American tanks have been destroyed; and that no casualties have been inflicted by Iraqi forces.

And those are just some of the more outrageous claims that have been revealed as lies. Virtually every thing that is said is a lie. And they're not even good lies. They're not even credible lies. They are absolutely shameless lies. Tall tales are told of the pinpoint precision and flawless performance of Tomahawk cruise missiles even while a brief blurb on the constantly running news ticker reveals that quite a few of them don't even hit the right country. The U.S. military is discussed with awestruck reverence, its technological superiority said to render it omnipotent, just after an Iraqi videotape reveals that an Apache Longbow helicopter, one of the most heavily armed and technologically advanced weapons in the U.S. arsenal, has been taken out by a group of villagers and farmers armed with rifles.

The Iraqi regime is loudly denounced for violating the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war after doing nothing more diabolical than airing brief video clips of the questioning of American POWs (which was done to expose the lies put out by Washington and the U.S. media), and that denunciation comes from a regime that has openly advocated using torture on 'terrorist' suspects, that has reportedly beaten Afghan prisoners to death at a special 'interrogation' center (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,909294,00.html>), and that has used a 'terrorist' suspect's young children as leverage to extract information (<http://www.nypost.com/news/worldnews/69950.htm>).

George Bush stands on the White House lawn and sternly cautions the Iraqis to treat American POWs fairly and humanely, in the same way that the U.S. has treated the prisoners that it holds humanely. Is this advice intended to be taken literally? Should we expect to soon be seeing videotape of American POWs being stripped, bound, blindfolded, tossed into 'tiger cages' and left exposed to the elements? Is that what Bush has in mind?

It has taken less than a week of warfare for the administration's justifications for waging it to be exposed as lies. No alleged 'weapons of mass destruction,' and no 'banned' weapons have been deployed by Iraqi forces. Not so much as a Scud missile, it is now being admitted. And no caches of banned weapons have been found, despite advance billing. After flogging a blatantly fraudulent story of the discovery of a huge chemical weapons plant for a couple of days, the cable networks have fallen silent on the issue of quickly seizing bio/chem weapon stashes.

As for the claims of seeking to liberate the Iraqi people, it is abundantly clear that the Iraqi people are violently opposed to American-style 'liberation,' though that doesn't stop the Fox folks from continuing to prominently display an "Operation Iraqi Freedom" graphic.

Embedded News

'News' coverage of this war is heavily reliant on Pentagon-provided euphemisms. Most of them are fairly transparent. "Pockets of resistance," for instance, as in "coalition forces have met pockets of resistance," refers to U.S. troops meeting with fierce, organized resistance and taking casualties.

"Mechanical failure," as in "a coalition aircraft made a forced landing due to mechanical failure," means that a U.S. aircraft has been shot down by Iraqi forces. "Hard landing" means much the same thing. "Coalition," by the way, refers to an invading army composed of approximately 85% Americans, 15% Brits, and a couple of guys from Australia.

The phrase, "Iraqi troops dressed in civilian clothes," refers to either (1) civilians paraded before the cameras and claimed to be captured Iraqi POWs, or (2) civilians that have willingly taken up arms to assist the Iraqi military in repelling the U.S. invasion. And "Iraqi troops feigning surrender and attacking U.S. troops" refers to Iraqi troops outmaneuvering U.S. troops and inflicting casualties.

Finding anything resembling the truth through the dense fog of lies is not an easy task. But one thing seems pretty clear: the Beast has been wounded. And that is a rather scary thing, because one of the Beast's worst fears is of being perceived as being weak. If threatened with exposure of the fact that it is not omnipotent, it will act out in increasingly violent and unpredictable ways.

As near as can be determined, the Beast's Great War Plan lies in ruins. That is evident in the increasingly panicked tone of the 'news' coverage, and in the constant flow of statements from officials and analysts reassuring the American people that everything is proceeding smoothly, when that is clearly not the case. When a command and control center gets fragged almost before the first shots are fired, that's a pretty good sign that there might be some problems.

The U.S. appears to be pretty much winging it at this point. As one ABC military analyst (who apparently didn't understand his role, much to the dismay of Peter Jennings) surmised early on, the Iraqis appear to have taken the strategic initiative from the start of the war. The result of this is that the U.S. has been forced into a reactive mode.

The military component of this operation has been scrapped primarily because, U.S. arrogance being what it is, no one bothered to factor in such elements as an actual opposing army. Meanwhile, the psychological warfare component, being conducted largely by the allegedly 'free' American press, is laughably inept and completely ineffective in obtaining Washington's objectives.

The current situation is that, having quickly come to the realization that none of their targets in the south can be taken without sustained and bloody battles, the U.S. war machine is apparently staking it all now on a battle for Baghdad, in a reckless bid to save face and in the desperate hope that the fall of Baghdad will result in the surrender of the rest of the country.

As all the analysts explained initially, it is absolutely essential that an advancing army 'secure the rear.' It is a basic rule of warfare that you don't leave yourself vulnerable to attack from the rear by leaving hostile forces in your wake. You don't take the chance that you will find yourself cut off from supply and support, surrounded by enemy forces. That is why the analysts all assured everyone that all the cities in the south would be quickly secured before the march on Baghdad.

But now, having revealed that the fall of Baghdad has purportedly always been our top priority, all of that becomes insignificant and the analysts all now marvel at the "amazing flexibility" and "boldness" of U.S. military planners. In truth, what those masters of war are doing is sending tens of thousands of young, unsuspecting American kids into a situation where they could very well find themselves cut off, surrounded, and pummeled by Iraqi forces.

Even without the problems presented by an unsecured rear, U.S. forces have virtually no chance of taking Baghdad by conventional means.

Umm Qasr

The border town of Umm Qasr has been hammered for five days, bearing the full weight of the U.S. war machine. It has been subjected to unrelenting aerial bombardment, massive artillery shelling, heavy tank fire, and everything else 'coalition' forces can think to throw at it. And yet resistance remains.

Umm Qasr, it should be noted, is a town of just 4,000 residents. It lies within sight of U.S. military encampments in Kuwait. It is in the Shiite south, which was supposed to offer little or no resistance to U.S. occupation. And it is being defended, according to a March 23 report in Financial Times, by a force of just "120 Iraqi soldiers still fighting against overwhelming odds."

Baghdad, on the other hand, is a sprawling city of some 5,000,000 residents. It lies several hundred miles from U.S. base camps, in central Iraq, where the Hussein regime enjoys its highest levels of support. And it is defended by tens of thousands of elite troops, supplemented with tens of thousands of regular army forces, and

probably as many as a million armed citizens. And that number is growing day by day; instead of a massive flow of refugees out of the country, there has been, and continues to be, a steady flow of Iraqis and others entering the country to assist in the defense of Baghdad and other Iraqi cities.

For a preview of the battle for Baghdad, take the siege of Umm Qasr and multiply by a factor of at least a thousand.

Desert Warriors

But surely, you say, our vastly superior forces can easily defeat the Iraqis. Our troops are better trained, better equipped, and have much higher morale. Everyone knows that.

But I beg to differ. It is very unlikely that our troops are better trained. I doubt very much that some reservist snatched off the streets of Southern California knows any more about waging tank warfare in a desert sandstorm than I do. It seems very unlikely that our troops are better trained than troops that were born, raised and trained in the environment that they are now fighting in.

And what do U.S. military planners, despite all their bluster and arrogance, know about waging mechanized warfare? When was the last time that the U.S. war machine was engaged in a war that was primarily reliant on mechanized ground forces? The last time I checked, it was during WWII, six decades ago.

Korea and Vietnam, it will be recalled, were jungle warfare operations. All subsequent wars have been almost entirely reliant on air power. This war then is something of a test for U.S. military strategists. Iraqi generals, on the other hand, are intimately familiar with the concept of mechanized desert warfare.

Psychological Motivation

The notion that U.S. troops have higher morale and are more motivated to fight seems rather unlikely as well. The American men and women deployed over there have no personal stake in the outcome of this invasion. They have been motivated by lies, and as those lies unravel, and as 'coalition' casualties mount (and there is no question that losses are already significantly higher than has been acknowledged), troop morale will drop precipitously, if it hasn't begun to do so already.

Iraqi troops, on the other hand, are fighting in defense of their homeland. Each and every one of them has a personal stake in repelling the U.S. occupation. They are on their home turf, fighting in defense of family. U.S. troops are ill prepared for the ferocity of the fighting that will be required to seize Baghdad.

As for U.S. troops being better equipped, there is no question that that is true. The 'coalition' has an enormous technological advantage, and unquestioned air superiority. But high-tech weapons can be seriously hampered by low-tech means, and Mother Nature can sometimes provide a most inhospitable environment for sensitive electronics. Desert sandstorms and burning trenches, despite official denials, can wreak havoc with guidance systems. Sandstorms, in fact, and sand in general, wreak havoc with pretty much everything. This is true, of course, on the Iraqi side as well, though one would think that the native peoples have a little more experience dealing with the special problems posed by desert warfare.

US Military Superiority

We as Americans live with the myth that everything that we do is, by definition, the best, and that myth certainly extends to our military prowess. But all that we are really the 'best' at is throwing exorbitant sums of money at our military services, which means that we are heavily armed and in possession of a vast array of technological wonders.

But all that can be concluded from that with any certainty is that, along with an unfathomable number of dead bodies, we will leave behind in Iraq hundreds of billions of dollars worth of destroyed military equipment and exploded munitions.

Iraq is in a unique position in this war: it is the only nation that has had an opportunity to learn first-hand how to defend against the uniquely American style of modern warfare. These lessons were learned at a tremendous cost, but they appear to have been translated into successful military strategies.

It is very unlikely that the relatively light use of U.S. air power has anything to do with humanitarian concerns.

It is more likely due to the fact that the Iraqis aren't presenting the 'coalition' with very many targets that can be hit from the air. Smoke, sand, well-camouflaged Iraqi equipment deployed in small detachments rather than easily targeted columns, and the placement of multiple decoys, have all likely contributed to frustrating U.S. pilots and military planners.

So too has the fact that the Iraqis have held back thus far on deploying any of their aircraft. They have also made scant use of rockets and missiles, and have made only partial use of air defense systems. This is apparently due to a conscious decision to preserve these weapons for the defense of Baghdad. Despite boasts that Iraq's failure to wield these weapons represents some kind of victory for the 'coalition,' it appears as though the Baghdad regime opted to minimize its up-front losses by keeping key defensive assets hidden and riding out the initial U.S. assaults.

Baghdad

While much of this is speculation at this point, what isn't speculation is that the Beast is wounded. It is weakened and it will attempt to reassert its supremacy by taking Baghdad at all costs. And how will it do that? One has to look no further than the strategy that is being employed at Umm Qasr:

"Coalition commanders insist they are trying to avoid civilian casualties and preserve as much of Iraq's civil infrastructure as possible, but officers would rather flush out snipers with tanks and aircraft than risk their troops on the ground. 'It makes sense for us to do this,' said one US commander quoted by Reuters in Umm Qasr yesterday after Harriers dropped two 500 lb bombs on a building used by Iraqi resisters. 'Rather than send men in there, we're just going to destroy it.'"

(http://search.ft.com/search/article.html?id=030323000670&query=ominous+signs&vsc_appId=totalSearch&state=Form)

Baghdad will prove to be very resistant to being destroyed. Millions of Iraqi people have a lot riding on the defense of the city. But Team Bush has a lot riding on the fall of Baghdad. Expect a massive infusion of U.S. troops. Expect a concerted campaign to lower expectations as a war that was billed in advance as a war that would be over in days becomes a campaign that could take weeks ... and then months ... and then ... ?

Failure is not an option for the Beast. It will employ any means it deems necessary to achieve its ends. It will carpet-bomb residential areas. It will fire-bomb cities. It will employ every weapon in its arsenal, including the chemical ones and including the nuclear ones. Indeed, it will deploy chemical weapons, claim it was the Iraqis who did so, and then use that as a pretext to step up to nuclear weapons. It will sacrifice tens of thousands of its native sons and daughters. It will sacrifice an unlimited number of Iraqis. It will brutally suppress efforts to hamper its war drive.

The Beast is wounded and is beginning to panic. These are interesting times we are living in.

Dave McGowan

PS: I wasn't going to mention it, but prognostications on the Iraq war were remarkably consistent across the board. Pundits and theorists in all avenues of the media - print, broadcast, and the lowly internet - forecast a very short war. War proponents foresaw a quick and painless war with a happy ending. Foes of the war foresaw a quick and - for our side - painless war with devastating consequences for the Iraqi people.

This newsletter, however, stood apart from the crowd and repeatedly warned that the Iraqis would resist with a fury, and that this war would be a long and bloody affair in which countless U.S. casualties would pile up.

This newsletter also cautioned, in November of last year, that the U.S. had established legal justification for its war even without an additional UN Security Council resolution. It was postulated that the legal argument would go something like this: "In 1991, resolution 687 provided a blueprint for actions that Iraq would have to take in order to end hostilities in the area and restore peace and security. Resolution 687 also explicitly made fulfillment of those obligations by Iraq a prerequisite for a ceasefire to go into effect. Iraq has, however, never fulfilled those obligations. The ceasefire, therefore, never actually went into effect, and we are still duty-bound to achieve our 'stated objective of restoring international peace and security in the area' by 'all necessary means.'"

(<http://davesweb.cnchost.com/nwsltr23.html>)

On March 20, U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte presented to the UN Security Council the United States' legal argument justifying its decision to invade Iraq. As the Los Angeles Times reported, Negroponte "noted that Resolution 687, which was adopted in April 1991, imposed disarmament obligations on Iraq that were conditions of the cease-fire signed at the end of the Gulf War ... 'It has long been recognized and understood that a material breach of these obligations removes the basis of the cease-fire and revives the authority to use force under Resolution 678,' Negroponte wrote. 'In view of Iraq's material reaches, the basis for the cease-fire has been removed, and the use of force is authorized ... to restore international peace and security in the area.'" (<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-war-reasons21mar21,1,2904576.story>)

Sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it?

NEWSLETTER #33

<http://davesweb.cnchost.com/nwsltr33.html>

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