

GI SPECIAL 4B26:



[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

**“I Don’t Like Anything
About Being Here”**

**“It Makes You Wonder,
What Do You Gain By
Sticking Around?”**

“I Think It’s The Way We’re Losing More Soldiers”

“It’s Like Trying To Track Down A Bunch Of Ghosts”

February 26, 2006 By Thomas E. Ricks. Washington Post [Excerpts]

PATROL BASE SWAMP, Iraq: Here, in a half-ruined house bristling with dull black machine guns and surrounded by green sandbags, shin-deep mudholes, and shadowy palm groves, lies the leading edge of the U.S. war in Iraq.

This remote outpost, manned by Bravo Company of a unit in the 101st Airborne Division, is the forwardmost American position in the so-called Triangle of Death southwest of Baghdad.

Some U.S. commanders say the region is now the focal point in their campaign against Iraq's stubborn insurgency. [**“Some U.S. commanders” must get their ideas from space aliens. What happens in these few impoverished villages makes little difference in the war.**]

It's a tough fight: Just getting U.S. troops established here in the canal-laced fields of the Euphrates River Valley meant running a gantlet of roadside bombs, with one platoon encountering 14 in a three-hour stretch.

This is the war of the lyahs, as American troops call the cluster of hard-bitten towns named Mahmudiyah, Yusufiyah, Latifiyah and Iskandariyah that over the last two years became insurgent strongholds.

(Ebel's 101st Division brigade running Patrol Base Swamp and operating southwest of Baghdad is attached to the 4th Infantry Division, which has responsibility for the Baghdad area.)

Here in the area south and west of Baghdad, the push by the Army's 4th Infantry was launched in recent months to give the capital some breathing space.

"My job, above all things, is to keep them out of Baghdad," said Capt. Andre Rivier, the Swiss-American commander of Patrol Base Swamp.

[And there, in one sentence, you find the classic blind stupidity of this defeated Imperial war of occupation. "They" are impossible to "keep out of Baghdad," because "they" live in Baghdad. "They" were living in Baghdad for centuries before Bush launched his doomed effort to occupy Iraq. "They" are called Iraqis, and, at last count, there are about five million of "them" in Baghdad. So what does keeping "them" out of Baghdad mean? Nothing. Why are these soldiers dying? For no reason at all. In vain. For no rational purpose. The resistance is huge in Baghdad, and always has been. Duh.]

"The important thing is to keep them fighting here. That's really the crux of the fight." By taking the battle to rural-based insurgents, the Army hopes to gain the initiative, pressuring the enemy at a time and place of the Americans' choosing, rather than simply trying to catch suicide bombers as they drive into the capital.

Despite its proximity to the city, this area was visited surprisingly sporadically by U.S. troops over the last three years.

Even now there are pockets where no American faces have been seen, and there still are no-go areas for U.S. troops where the roads are heavily seeded with bombs. Following counterinsurgency doctrine, Ebel doesn't want to take areas and then leave them.

So he moves his forces slowly, first establishing a checkpoint, then conducting patrols to study the area and its people, and then, after a pause, pushing his front line half a mile forward and putting up another checkpoint.

It is a difficult way to wage war. On one typical day this month, there were 24 "significant acts." small-arms attacks, bombings and other noteworthy events, recorded in one relatively small part of Ebel's area of operations.

"We got ambushed all over" but didn't suffer any casualties, said Maj. Daniel Morgan, operations officer in a 101st battalion southwest of Baghdad. "We've been pushing into the west," into insurgent havens along the Euphrates River southeast of Fallujah, "and they don't like it."

A drawback in this slow motion war is that some soldiers find it frustrating.

At the medic's station in Patrol Base Swamp, which with its bare cots and hanging light bulbs feels like a scene from World War II, three soldiers of the 101st said they loathe their time here, especially since the death of a beloved squad leader a week earlier.

"It's like trying to track down a bunch of ghosts," said Sgt. Chad Wendel, sitting on an Army cot under a window frame shielded by a blanket.

"I think it's the way we're losing more soldiers" that is most bothersome, added Spec. Frank Moore, a medic from Lynchburg, Va. "It makes you wonder, what do you gain by sticking around?"

"I don't like anything about being here," agreed Spec. Matthew Ness.

The U.S. effort now is characterized by a more careful, purposeful style that extends even to how Humvees are driven in the streets.

For years, "the standard was to haul ass," noted Lt. Col. Gian P. Gentile, commander of the 8th Squadron of the 10th Cavalry Regiment, which is based near a bomb-infested highway south of Baghdad.

Now his convoy drivers are ordered to move at 15 mph. "I'm a firm believer in slow, deliberate movement," he said. "You can observe better, if there's IEDs on the road."

It also is less disruptive to Iraqis and sends a message of calm control, he noted.

[“Hey Ahmed, how do you like this message of calm control we’re getting?” “Just love it, Rashid, the idiots are going so slow we can’t miss them even if we were throwing bricks. Shit, we can sight on them so easy now.”]

In an ominous sign of the growing rift within Iraqi security forces, the first thing an Iraqi army battalion staff officer did as he briefed a reporter this month was denounce the Iraqi police and its leaders at the Shiite-dominated Interior Ministry.

"The army doesn't like the Ministry of Interior," said the officer, who asked that his name not be used for fear of retaliation. "The people don't like the police, either."

Also, there is no question among U.S. military intelligence officers that the insurgency remains robust.

No one argues it is spreading, but many say it is intensifying in Baghdad and the Sunni Triangle north and west of the capital, with a steady increase in violence for much of last year. These officers note that there are still about 1,000 roadside bombs detonated a month, with another 500 detected before being exploded.

The biggest difference in Baghdad from two or three years ago is the nearly total absence of U.S. troops on its streets.

In a major gamble, the city largely has been turned over to Iraqi police and army troops. If those Iraqi forces falter, leaving a vacuum, U.S. pressure elsewhere could push the insurgency into the capital. "I think they're going to go to Baghdad" next, worried Morgan.

The streets of the capital already feel as unsafe as at any time since the 2003 invasion.

Army Reserve Capt. A. Heather Coyne, an outspoken former White House counterterrorism official, said, "There is a total lack of security in the streets, partly because of the insurgents, partly because of criminals, and partly because the security forces can be dangerous to Iraqi citizens too."

When this reporter was permitted to review an in-depth classified intelligence summary of recent "significant acts" occurring in the capital, it appeared surprisingly incomplete, generally listing only two sorts of events: anything that affected U.S. troops, and the killing of Iraqis. Other actions affecting Iraqis (kidnappings, rapes, robberies, bombs that don't kill anyone, and a variety of forms of intimidation) don't appear to be on the U.S. military's radar screen.

As one soldier put it, that's all "background noise."

"It seems to be getting better, but you really can't tell," said Cpl. Toby Gilbreath, posted to Patrol Base San Juan, an imposing bunker west of Baghdad.

"I would like to think that there are still possibilities here," Army Reserve Lt. Col. Joe Rice said in the coffee shop of the al-Rashid Hotel in Baghdad's Green Zone. "We are finally getting around to doing the right things," said Rice, who is working on an Army "lessons learned" project here but who was expressing his personal opinion.

"I think we're getting better, I do."

But, he continued, "is it too little too late?"

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Baghdad IED Kills Two U.S. Soldiers

February 26, 2006 The Associated Press & HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES
CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS RELEASE Number: 06-02-02C

BAGHDAD, Iraq: A Multi-National Division Baghdad Soldier died when the vehicle he was riding in was struck by a roadside bomb at approximately 2:50 a.m. Feb. 26 in western Baghdad.

The U.S. military said one of the two soldiers died immediately when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb. The second died at a military hospital.

Another U.S. Soldier Killed In Baghdad

February 27, 2006 Reuters

A U.S. soldier was killed by small arms fire on Sunday evening in central Baghdad, the U.S. military said in a statement.

REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



6.14.05 US soldiers patrol in the Al-Ray neighbourhood of south Baghdad. (AFP/Yuri Cortez)

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Resistance Inmates Take Over Prison Wing

(Feb. 26) By AMIR SHAH, AP, KABUL, Afghanistan

Hundreds of inmates, including convicted al-Qaida and Taliban militants, waving knives and wielding clubs made from furniture overpowered guards and took control of parts of a high-security prison in Afghanistan's capital, officials said Sunday.

Police and soldiers surrounded the Policharki Prison as government officials tried to negotiate through loudspeakers with the inmates. Their demands were not known.

Mohammed Qasim Hashimzai, deputy justice minister, reported some initial progress in talks, but an Associated Press correspondent heard periodic gunfire and prisoners shouting, "God is Great!"

Inmates agreed to move 70 female prisoners from a wing under their control to a wing under official control, Hashimzai said.

The rioting [translation: rebellion] started Saturday night when prisoners refused to put on new uniforms, delivered in response to a breakout last month by seven Taliban inmates disguised as visitors, Hashimzai said.

Prisoners forced guards out of a cell block housing about 1,300 inmates, said Abdul Salaam Bakshi, chief of prisons in Afghanistan. He accused al-Qaida and Taliban inmates of inciting other prisoners.

The Afghan army deployed more than 100 soldiers, some with helmets and rocket-propelled grenade launchers, to surround the prison, along with NATO peacekeepers [translation: occupation troops]. Forces parked 10 tanks and armored personnel carriers outside the gates. One soldier, however, said they were firing rubber bullets, not live ammunition.

"All the problem is inside the prison," Bakshi said. "We want to peacefully solve this problem."

Hashimzai said at least four inmates were injured in the riot Saturday night but prisoners refused an offer for them to be treated. No guards were hurt in the clash, he said.

Bakshi said the inmates attacked guards and tried to force their way out of their prison block but were stopped. He said the inmates had small knives and clubs fashioned from wrecked furniture and set fire to bedding.

The prison holds 2,000 inmates, including some 350 al-Qaida and Taliban militants.

Hashimzai said about 100 inmates took control of the women's wing.

A justice ministry delegation visited the prison on the outskirts of Kabul Sunday morning to negotiate with the prisoners.

"They have demands, we are going to listen to what they want," Hashimzai said. "If we cannot solve it through negotiations, we have our own options." He refused to say whether he was referring to the use of force.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)

TROOP NEWS

Every bomb dropped on Iraq explodes on the Gulf Coast.

“Walkin’ To New Orleans” Veterans’ and Survivors’ March for Peace and Justice

March 19th is the third anniversary of the US war in Iraq. It's now estimated that the invasion and occupation may cost \$2.65 trillion, in addition to over 2,400 American troops and over 100,000 Iraqis killed.

The US government has erected bases in Iraq that are like cities in mere months to continue this illegal war, but it has excluded Gulf Coast residents from any input into reconstruction plans after Hurricane Katrina.

Veterans together with residents from affected communities have organized a 5-day march to demand an end to this criminal neglect of the Gulf Coast.

Veterans, families and hurricane survivors are invited to walk all or part of this pilgrimage. All concerned citizens are encouraged to attend the March 19th rally in New Orleans.

If we can build cities in the desert for WAR, we can rebuild cities in the US for JUSTICE.

VETERANS FOR PEACE
IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR
GOLD STAR FAMILIES FOR PEACE
MILITARY FAMILIES SPEAK OUT
VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR
jointly with Gulf coast communities,
rescuers and relief workers,
and those who who provided care
after the devastation of Katrina

March 14–19, 2006
Tuesday– Sunday
Mobile, AL to New Orleans, LA



**End
the War
in Iraq!**



**Justice
for the
Gulf Coast!**

Bring the Survivors Home Now! Bring the Troops Home Now!

For more info: see www.vetgulfmarch.org, or call Mobile VFP at 251-604-1837

THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME; BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



The coffin containing the body of U.S. Army Cpl. Sergio Antonio Mercedes Saez who died recently in Iraq, at his funeral in San Pedro de Macoris, east of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Feb. 20, 2006. Sergio was born in Puerto Rico and grew up in the Dominican Republic. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

An Appeal On Behalf Of New York State War Veterans: Help Them Get DU Testing!

February 26, 2006, The Staten Island Advance

I have written these pages previously on the parallels between this War on Iraq and the previous Vietnam War.

My latest conclusion is that the use of munitions and hardened armor plating made with depleted uranium, we are repeating history.

I remember too well my generation struggling with the effects of Agent Orange, long unrecognized by the Veterans Administration and the Department of Defense.

When our military indiscriminately sprayed the jungles of Southeast Asia, poisoning the land and indigenous peoples with dioxin, it also made our military gravely ill. We saw seriously ill Vietnam War veterans ignored by their government and they produced children with sometimes severe unexplained birth defects.

Now Agent Orange is officially recognized as being a possible cause. Problem is, it is too late for many veterans and their families.

Likewise, I am hearing many 1991 Gulf War veterans are suffering unexplained illnesses and producing children with severe birth defects. Approximately 375 tons of depleted uranium was used during that conflict.

Now in this current conflict, are our troops being poisoned again? I don't know, but many experts including Major Doug Rokke (U.S. Pentagon Depleted Uranium Project) claim this is just the case.

Some estimates in this Iraq/Afghanistan war period claim that over 2,200 tons of poisonous "depleted uranium" have been used.

On Feb. 7, many veterans and military families from across New York State went to Albany on behalf of a bill in the Assembly (A-9116).

Many have made the observation that our state militia (National Guard) has been deployed to some of these areas of potential contamination. Veterans from the Bronx have already tested positive for "depleted uranium" poisoning, including Gerard Matthew, whose wife has given birth to a baby daughter with severe birth defects post-deployment.

Many realize the uphill fight in Albany and the necessity of a Republican sponsor in the State Senate for this bill to become law.

So please contact Sen. John Marchi for sponsorship. The bill would establish an expert task-force, a health registry for National Guard and monitoring of their health, including proper testing.

GEORGE McANANAMA, LIVINGSTON

Fox News' O'Reilly Says Get Out Of Iraq

Feb 22, 2006 Media Matters

During the February 20 broadcast of his nationally syndicated radio show, Bill O'Reilly suggested that the United States "hand over everything to the Iraqis as fast as humanly possible" because "[t]here are so many nuts in the country, so many crazies, that we can't control them." O'Reilly then claimed that the "big mistake" was actually "the crazy-people underestimation."

As Media Matters for America has documented, during a November 30, 2005, appearance on NBC's Today, O'Reilly called those advocating immediate withdrawal from Iraq "pinheads" and compared them to Hitler appeasers.

Comment: T

During the American war in Vietnam, fundamentalist preachers in Bloomington, Indiana would occasionally show up on the court house square Saturdays to preach the war up as a great battle against “Godless, atheistic Communism” and then stick out their hands for money.

Not long after Tet, they began to preach that “God almighty never meant for our American boys to go off to Godless Vietnam; they should come home,” and then stick out their hands for money.

That meant something. That meant they knew what got them followers, and money, and what didn't. And they were in the money getting business, which is what a lot of religion is. And O'Reilly is no different.

“Enlisted Soldiers Are Given Jail Time, While Officers Are Given Nothing More Than A Slap On The Wrist”

Letters To The Editor
Army Times
2.27.06

For all of my 30-plus years of active service as an enlisted, noncommissioned officer and commissioned officer, I was always told the higher the paygrade, the higher the standards and the greater the responsibility.

The punishment handed out to Chief Warrant Officer 3 Lewis Welshofer Jr. is nothing less than a mockery of justice (“Suffocation of Iraqi general draws reprimand,” Feb. 6).

Enlisted soldiers and junior NCOs are given jail time, while officers and warrant officers are given nothing more than a slap on the wrist.

To allow this officer to remain on active duty and continue in a position of responsibility is sending a message that as long as you're an officer, you need not worry about losing your career regardless of the crime you may be charged with.

I don't know what is worse: letting this individual remain on active duty in a position of trust or allowing him to retire with full benefits.

The officers who sat on the court-martial board should be ashamed of themselves for their part in this miscarriage of justice.

What message is being sent to our enemies when they are faced with interrogating our soldiers who may have the misfortune to become prisoners of war?

If enlisted soldiers and NCOs are discharged from the service without benefits, then the same disciplinary action must be handed down to warrant officers and commissioned officers.

Former Capt. Paul F. Blemings
Marshfield, Wis.

Generals Who Won't Testify While Lower Ranking Personnel Are On Trial

Letters To The Editor
Army Times
2.27.06

Generals who won't testify? ("Two-star won't testify in Abu Ghraib cases," Jan. 23)

What's happening to our officers corps?

It is profoundly disturbing and disruptive to good order and discipline to learn that a general officer has seen fit to invoke his rights under Article 31, while lower-ranking personnel are on trial for mistreating Abu Ghraib detainees.

It is immaterial that the general's lawyer didn't know that a colonel had been granted immunity or that Maj. Gen. Geoffrey D. Miller has already answered all the questions he has been asked.

When you live by a code that says you "will not lie, cheat or steal," it is simple to answer the same questions again and again unless you're having trouble remembering how you answered them the first time; that only becomes difficult when less-than-candid responses become hard to remember the second and third time around.

The general wants to retire. Who wouldn't?

But before he goes, he owes those enlisted personnel the right to full and fair trials. Miller should immediately be given full immunity and be required to testify to set the record straight.

If he originated orders to abuse, or permitted an atmosphere of abuse, or if he received and passed on such orders or conduct from higher authorities, the Army deserves the full truth, and we'll all do better for having it.

Former Capt. Thomas Piel
Sherman, Conn.

Counter Recruiters Advance: Recruiters Retreat

February 24, 2006 Socialist Worker, SOUTH HADLEY, Mass.

"NSA on the attack. What do we do? Stand up, fight back!" chanted some two dozen antiwar activists, most of them students at Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Academy (PVPA) and Holyoke Community College (HCC).

The students came together February 16 outside the U.S. Armed Forces Recruiting Station on a bitterly cold afternoon. "We're here to call attention to the links between the war in Iraq, the government's war on dissent and the economic draft that forces many students to choose combat because they can't afford an education," said Mike Fiorentino of the PVPA Antiwar Committee.

Taryn Biggs of the HCC Anti-War Coalition agreed. "Every semester, our tuition and fees go up, and financial aid becomes harder to get," said Taryn. "It's obscene to spend billions of dollars to kill Afghans and Iraqis when kids can't afford an education, and New Orleans is still devastated." "No wonder the powers that be fear dissent," she said, pointing at the police cars keeping a close watch on the students.

It wasn't possible to ask the recruiters for their opinions. As soon as they heard the activists were coming, they closed up shop.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

**Sadr Calls On Iraqis To Unite
And Demand US Troops Get
Out Of Iraq:
Meets With Sunni Clerics;
Condemns "A Plan By The
Occupation To Spark A
Sectarian War"**

2.26.06 Anatolia.com & Syria Times 2.25.06 & Turkish Press & 23 February 2006 AFP

BAGHDAD: The movement of firebrand Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, alleged to have played a role in the anti-Sunni violence over the last few days, publicly made peace with political and religious Sunni leaders on Saturday.

Four sheikhs from the Sadr movement made a "pact of honor" with the conservative Sunni Muslim Scholars Association, calling for an end to attacks on places of worship, the shedding of blood and condemning any act leading to sedition.

The agreement was made in the particularly symbolic setting of Baghdad's premier Sunni mosque Abu Hanifa where the Shiite sheikhs prayed under the guidance of prominent Sunni imam Abdel Salam al-Qubaissi.

The meeting was broadcast on television and the religious leaders all "condemned the blowing up of the Shiite mausoleum of Samarra as much as the acts of sabotage against the houses of God as well as the assassinations and terrorization of Muslims".

The meeting also announced the formation of a commission to "determine the reasons for the crisis with a view to solving it", while also calling for a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops.

While overwhelmingly Shiite and representing thousands of poor and disaffected Shiites across the country, Sadr's movement has often made overtures to the Sunni Arabs over their mutual dislike of the US presence in the country.

Al-Sadr, who has been on a tour of Iran and Arab countries since late January, warned against "a plan by the occupation to spark a sectarian war," and called on Sunni groups such as the Association of Muslim Scholars to form a joint panel that would prevent sectarian attacks.

Earlier an official with Sadr's al-Mahdi Army movement in Najaf, south of Baghdad, said al-Sadr had ordered members of his militia to protect Sunni mosques in majority Shia areas in southern Iraq.

Sadr's office in Najaf issued a statement Saturday calling on his followers to eschew their trademark black uniforms.

"The order has been given to members of the Mehdi Army to no longer wear their black uniform, so that it not exploited by those who commit crimes," said the statement.

The statement added that those attacking mosques were "criminal bands with no links to the Sadr movement."

Moqtada Sadr arrived Sunday in Basra from Iran following a Middle East tour and immediately called on Iraqis to unite and demand US troops withdrawal.

"I call on all Iraqis, Sunnis and Shiites, Muslims and non-Muslims, to take part in a demonstration of unity in Baghdad to call for the withdrawal of the forces of occupation, even if this has to take place over time," he told supporters.

"Sunnis and Shiites must back each other and help each other because there is no difference between a Sunni and a Shiite. Iraqis must avoid division and unite in the face of the Crusaders," he said, speaking of US-led coalition forces.

Al-Sadr called for the withdrawal of occupation troops from Iraq in accordance with a timetable.

He demanded the Iraqi Parliament to vote for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq as a whole.

MORE:

“Almost No Newspaper Showed How Great, It Appeared To Us, The Solidarity Among Iraqis Was Yesterday”

February 23, 2006 Twentyfourstepstoliberty.blogspot.com [Excerpts]

You guys always said you don't get all the news from Iraq. And I always agreed with you!

I was shocked today when I read the news in the foreign newspapers.

No one emphasized the marvelous cooperation and solidarity between the Shiites and the Sunnis in Iraq yesterday after the bombing of one of the most respected and visited holy sites in Islam, the Askariyah shrine, which is in Samarra city north of Baghdad.

The shrine contains the remains of two 9th century Imams, Imam Ali al-Hadi and Imam Hasan Askari. They are now wrongly considered as Shiite Imams.

(Just so you know, in the 9th century there weren't Shiites and Sunnis yet. There were Muslims, who were fighting each other over power. And later on they invented Sunni and Shiite parts of Islam.

(Also for a background, all the dead "Shiite" Imams of the earlier centuries, like Mousa Kadhum, Ali, Hussein, and others, are considered as Sunni Imams too and are very much respected by all Muslims because they descend from Prophet Muhammed.

(Sunni Imams, like Abu Haneefa, Abdul Qadir Gailani, Ahmed Rifaie, and others, cannot be considered as Shiite Imams because not all of them share the same grandfather.

(Therefore, I told my friends yesterday that the terrorists played it wrong: if they want to provoke a civil war, they should attack shrines of Sunni Imams, because that would upset more Sunnis than Shiites, not like yesterday. Yesterday, the attack upset and angered Sunnis and Shiites equally.)

Here are some information, which, for whatever reason, you don't get in your news about the bombing:

The first reaction to the bombing which "targeted a Shiite" shrine came from the Sunni residents of Samarra. The first demonstration to condemn the attack was held spontaneously by Sunnis in the area where the shrine is. Almost all Sunni leaders went on TV to condemn the attack and show solidarity and unity with the Shiites.

Here are some of what the Sunni leaders said on TVs all day yesterday (that's what I could get)

The Iraqi Islamic Party, IIP, one of the most powerful Sunni political and religious groups, issued a statement saying: "The size of the wicked conspiracy that is targeting the Iraqis, their sacred symbols, and unity, is clear now. After the series of attacking mosques and assassinations of clergies, people of Samarra woke up today on the bombing of Imam Ali Al-Hadi dome.

"We, the Iraqi Islamic Party/ Samarra branch, denounce this criminal act and demand a wide investigation to reveal the controversies that raise many questions on who was behind this incident. The commandos have cordoned the holy shrine since last night and tied up its guards and put them in a room and the people of Samarra released them after the bombing.

"The commandos prevented shop owners from going to their shops in the morning and there was movement of the occupation forces in the city all night long.

"All these controversies and others need an honest and wide investigation to find the real criminals and not hide them no matter what the reason is. We in the Iraqi Islamic Party, Samarra branch, urge our people to go in wide, peaceful demonstrations to condemn this crime. We also remind all Iraqis to protect their unity to prevent the chance for suspicious conspiracies, which target all Iraqis with no exception. IIP, Samarra branch"

I was amazed how only the provocative and civil-war-style quotes were published today in the newspapers. Almost no newspaper showed how great, it appeared to us, the solidarity among Iraqis was yesterday.

I am not saying that Shiites and Sunnis kissed and hugged after the attack yesterday. All what I am saying is that the news made Iraqis look like if they were fighting each other widely in the streets, which is not true.

All expect civil war in Iraq, which might happen although I don't believe it would. Therefore, they want to contribute to the civil war's first step.

Shame on you all! Shame on the "free and honest" press!

MORE:

What An Amazing Coincidence

February 24, 2006 Michael Howard in Irbil, The Guardian

Sunnis accuse Shia parties of running death squads from the interior ministry, and demand that security be transferred into more neutral hands.

This week both Jack Straw and the US ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, backed those calls. But a senior western diplomat in Baghdad said last night: "After (the) attack on the shrine, it is difficult to imagine that the Shia will relinquish control of anything."

MORE:

What An Amazing Coincidence #2

23 February 2006 Aljazeera.Net

In the worst single incident, officials said 47 people, who had taken part in a joint Sunni and Shia demonstration in Baghdad against Wednesday's bombing, were hauled from their cars and shot dead.

Police said the attackers, who have not been identified, had set up a fake checkpoint on the outskirts of the capital.

MORE:

“Far From Dividing Sunni And Shiite, It Has In Fact United Them”

26 February, 2006 William Bowles, I'n'I, williambowles.info/ini/2006/0206/ini-0397.html
[Excerpt]

Most tellingly, the desecration of the mosque has had the opposite effect than the one intended; far from dividing Sunni and Shiite, it has in fact united them, once more revealing just how out of touch the occupiers are with the Iraqi people.

<p>OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME <u>NOW!</u></p>

The Lion's Roar Is Yet To Be Heard!



February 26, 2006 Hussein Al-alak, The Iraq Solidarity Campaign [EXCERPT]

With the destruction of the Mosque of Samarra at the front of my mind, along with the great disasters that have faced Iraq and all Iraqi people, it is said by many that out of the ashes the Lion of Babylon will rise again.

It will rise from the rubble, of its now ancient kingdom and glance over the ruins of the land between the two rivers.

Each second will encompass its own recollection of betrayals and tragedies. It will recall all influences, which made Mesopotamia great and will unleash a mighty roar, that will not just send shivers throughout the land of my father but indeed the lands, of the world over.

Assorted Resistance Action

February 26, 2006 The Associated Press & Anatolia.com & By SAMEER N. YACOUB, Associated Press Writer

A police commando was killed and two wounded when a roadside bomb exploded in Madain, officials said.

Six policemen were wounded in two separate incidents in the northern city of Mosul.

In Ramadi, west of Baghdad, gunmen killed an ex-general in Saddam Hussein's army as he drove his car through the Sunni-insurgent stronghold, a relative said.

Former Brig. Gen. MUSAAB MANFI AL-RAWI was rumored to be under consideration to become the army commander in Ramadi, said his cousin, AHMED AL-RAWI.

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATION**

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

“The Time Has Come For The Peace Movement To Unembedded Itself From The Democratic Party”

February 23, 2006 Bruce K. Gagnon, Coordinator Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space VIA Tom Condit tomcondit@igc.org [Excerpts]

The Boston Globe reported on February 20 that the Dems have put Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), a former Army officer, in charge of coming up with a consensus Democratic plan for the war. His answer? It's called "strategic redeployment."

What does that mean?

"It's important to note that it's not withdrawal, it's redeployment," Reed said.

The Dems are running an election game on us. They are feeling our pressure and this is their disingenuous response. Peace activists nationwide must see through this latest shell game and call it for what it is.

Strategic deception.

The time has come for the peace movement to unembedded itself from the Democratic Party. As long as peace activists see themselves as "party" people they will not have the ability to be critical of these kind of cynical moves to co-opt our energies.

I was in Germany right after the U.S. began the invasion of Afghanistan soon after 9-11.

The Green Party in Germany supported that invasion and angered the German peace movement. I saw German peace activists publicly condemn national Green Party leaders for supporting the U.S. war.

The peace activists understood where their primary allegiance belonged. To the anti-war movement first, and then to a party.

If the party goes astray, the peace movement does not follow. We must do the same here in the U.S.

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to thomasfbarton@earthlink.net. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

OCCUPATION REPORT

So Much For That “We’re There To Stop A Civil War” Bullshit

26 February 2006 Andrew Buncombe and Patrick Cockburn, The Independent (UK)
[Excerpt]

One important development over the past few days is that it is clearly becoming very difficult to use American or British troops to keep the peace, undermining the argument that they are the only bulwark against civil war.

The occupation forces lack the legitimacy to play the role of UN peacekeepers; it is almost impossible to have US soldiers defend a Sunni mosque against a Shia crowd, because if they open fire they will be seen as having joined one side in a sectarian struggle.

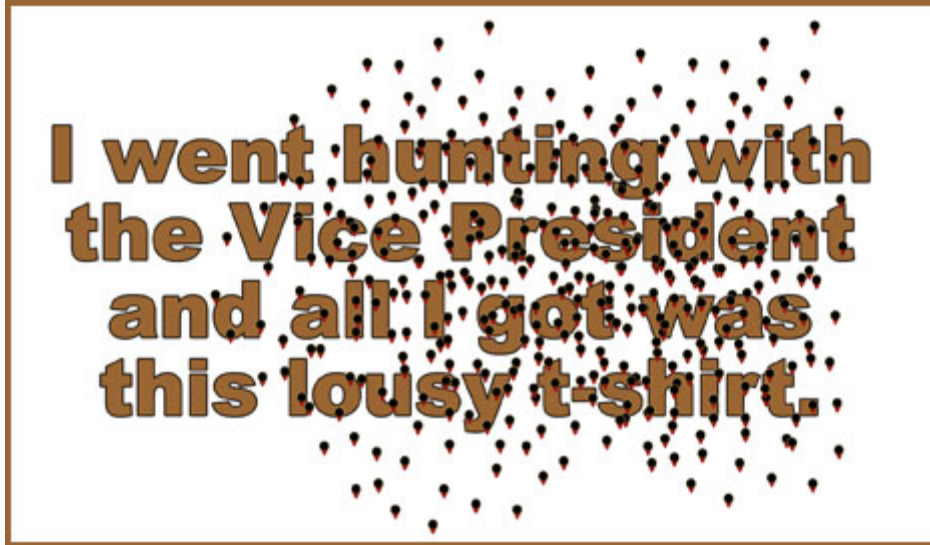
Iraq Beset By “Unanimous Gunmen”

Feb 22 (KUNA)

An explosive device went off on Wednesday while multi-national forces patrol was passing in Kirkuk's Cornish street, causing the injury of a US Marines serviceman who was rushed to hospital for treatment, an Iraqi police source said.

Also unanimous gunmen aboard a car abducted an Iraqi citizen in the same street today, the same source added.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



[Thanks to Katherine Y, who sent this in.]

“To Not Have Shot His Friend In The Face Would Have Sent A Message To The Quail That America Is Weak”

February 24, 2006 Socialist Worker

THE DAILY Show on Comedy Central had by far the best coverage of Shot-in-the-face-by Dick Cheney gate. Here, we print excerpts of a segment featuring anchor JON STEWART and senior vice presidential firearms mishap analyst ROB CORDDRY:

Corddry: Jon, tonight, the vice president is standing by his decision to shoot Harry Whittington. According to the best intelligence available, there were quail hidden in the brush. Everyone believed at the time there were quail in the brush. And while the quail turned out to be a 78-year-old man, even knowing that today, Mr. Cheney insists he still would have shot Mr. Whittington in the face.

He believes the world is a better place for his spreading buckshot throughout the entire region of Mr. Whittington's face.

Stewart: But why, Rob? If he had known Mr. Whittington was not a bird, why would he still have shot him?

Corddry: Jon, in a post-9/11 world, the American people expect their leaders to be decisive. To not have shot his friend in the face would have sent a message to the quail that America is weak...

Look, the mere fact that we're even talking about how the vice president drives up with his rich friends in cars to shoot farm-raised wingless quail-tards is letting the quail know

“how” we’re hunting them. I’m sure right now those birds are laughing at us in that little “covey” of theirs.

Stewart: I’m not sure birds can laugh, Rob.

Corddry: Well, whatever it is they do...coo...they’re cooing at us right now, Jon, because here we are talking openly about our plans to hunt them. Jig is up. Quails one, America zero.

Stewart: Okay, well, on a purely human level, is the vice president at least sorry?

Corddry: John, what difference does it make? The bullets are already in this man's face. Let's move forward across party lines as a people...to get him some sort of mask.

The Daily Show, February 13, 2006

The Great “Homeland Security” Fraud America's Fleecing In The Name Of Security

February 19, 2006 Veronique de Rugy, Nick Gillespie, San Francisco Chronicle
[Excerpts]

Rest easy, America. As a response to the Sept. 11 attacks, the Princeton, N.J., Fire Department now owns Nautilus exercise equipment, free weights and a Bowflex machine. The police dogs of Columbus, Ohio, are protected by Kevlar vests, thank God. Mason County, Wash., is the proud owner of a half-dozen state-of-the-art emergency radios (never mind that they are incompatible with existing county radios).

All of these crucial purchases, and many more like them, were paid for with homeland security grants.

Doesn't it make you feel more secure that \$100,000 in such money went to fund the federal Child Pornography Tipline? That \$38 million went to cover fire claims related to the April 2001 Cerro Grande fire in New Mexico? And that \$2.5 billion went to "highway security," that is, building and improving roads?

Since Sept. 11, 2001, Congress has appropriated nearly \$207 billion to protect us from terrorism. Total homeland security spending in 2006 will be at least \$50 billion, split between the Department of Homeland Security and many other agencies, including, improbably, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Commerce and NASA.

But far from making us more secure, the money is being allocated like so much pork.

Indeed, as the above examples suggest, states and cities are spending federal homeland security grants on pet projects that have little or nothing to do with security.

Hence, of the top 10 grant recipients, only the District of Columbia also appears on a list of the 10 places most at risk of attack (see table below). The U.S. Virgin Islands receives more per capita in homeland security spending (\$104.35) than does Washington, D.C. (\$34.16). So do Guam (\$90.36), the Northern Mariana Islands (\$54), Wyoming (\$37.74) and American Samoa (\$37.54).

And don't think high-risk cities necessarily spend their money wisely: The District of Columbia, for instance, used the first wave of homeland security aid as "seed money" for a computerized car-towing system Mayor Anthony Williams had promised for three years to help combat fraud by private towing companies. The city also used \$100,000 in homeland security money to fund the mayor's popular summer jobs program.

In the aftermath of the two attacks on the London subway system in July, lawmakers and lobbyists proposed increases from \$100 million to \$6 billion in funding to secure public transportation.

Yet if the London bombings teach us anything, it's that throwing money at transit security is unlikely to have an impact. After decades of combating Irish Republican Army terrorists, the London subway system is known to be one of the best protected in the world, but the large public investment in surveillance did not prevent the two terrorist attacks.

The second incident occurred even while the system was in maximum alert mode. Experts agree that options are limited, if not nonexistent, for preventing such strikes. So why spend money on it?

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and inside the armed services. Send requests to address up top.

CLASS WAR REPORTS

New Orleans Is Gone

We are back. But where are our neighbors, the people we rode out of the city with? Where are the hundreds of thousands of our neighbors and will they ever be allowed to return? Finally, if all levels of government and corporate power allow this to happen in New Orleans, do you think it will be any different in your city?

February 21, 2006 by Bill Quigley, CommonDreams [Excerpts]

Nearly six months ago, my wife Debbie and I boated out of New Orleans. We left five days after Katrina struck.

We were able to come back to New Orleans for good in mid-December because our house was located close to the University and only sustained roof damage. Very few of the people who were evacuated with us have been able to return.

It seems clear that most of the same people who were left behind in the evacuation for Katrina are being left behind again in the reconstruction of New Orleans. In fact, now there are even more being left behind.

Hundreds of thousands of people have not been able to make it back.

Drive through the city away from the French Quarter, Central Business District and the St. Charles streetcar line and you will see tens of thousands of still damaged and unoccupied homes.

Hundreds of thousands of people have not made it back.

There were 469,000 fewer people in the metropolitan New Orleans area in January 2006 than in August 2005.

Most of the City was still without power in early 2006. About two-thirds of the homes in New Orleans did not have electricity in early 2006, even fewer had gas.

Seventy-three percent of the homes in New Orleans were in areas damaged by the storm. But, as the Brown University study concluded "storm damage data shows that the storm's impact was disproportionately borne by the region's African-American community, by people who rented their homes and by the poor and unemployed."

Poor people were hardest hit and are having the hardest time returning.

"The population of the damaged areas was nearly half black (45.8% compared to 26.4% black in the rest of the region), living in rental housing (45.7% compared to 30.9%), and disproportionately below the poverty line (20.9% compared to 15.3%."

Renters are not coming back because there is little affordable housing. With tens of thousands of homes damaged, the cost of renting has skyrocketed. An apartment down the block from my house rented for \$600 last summer; it now rents for \$1400. Trailers have not arrived because of federal, state and local political misjudgments.

Over 10,000 trailers were still sitting unused on runways in Hope, Arkansas in February 2006. In my interviews with evacuees who were renters, few were protected by any insurance - most lost everything.

The little reconstruction that has started is aimed at home-owners. Louisiana is slated to receive \$6.2 billion in Community Development Block Grant money and the Governor says \$1 billion "could be used to encourage the rebuilding of affordable housing." So with 45% of the homes damaged occupied by renters, affordable housing "could" end up with 16% of the assistance.

Public housing is politically out of the question in early 2006. There is no national or local commitment to re-opening public housing in the city. U.S. Congressman Richard Baker, a longtime critic of public housing in New Orleans, was quoted in the Wall Street Journal after the storm saying "We finally cleaned up in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."

As the Brown study politely observed "people who previously lived in public housing seem to have the least chances to return, given current policy.

All public housing has been closed (and special barriers bolted to the doors).plans for reopening the projects or for constructing new affordable housing have not become public."

Debbie lost her nursing job when her hospital failed to reopen. She is not alone. There are now 200,000 fewer jobs in the area than in August.

When I teach about the working poor, I tell my students to look for the working poor at the bus stops in the morning and in the evening. The working poor have not returned. As the Brookings Institution Katrina Index tells us pre-Katrina public transportation in New Orleans averaged 124,000 riders per week; in January 2006 there were 11,709 a week, only 9% of the pre-storm number.

The sick are not likely to return anytime soon. Healthcare in New Orleans is now difficult even for those with insurance but nearly impossible for the poor without it.

While there were 22 hospitals open in New Orleans in June, in early 2006 there were 7, a 78% reduction. Before Katrina there were 53,000 hospital beds in the area, in February 2006 there were 15,000: waits of more than 8 hours in emergency rooms are not uncommon.

With so many hospitals closed, people needing regular medical care like dialysis or chemotherapy cannot expect to return. Worse still for the poor, there is no public hospital in New Orleans any more: the Charity Hospital that over 50% of the people in shelters went to has not been reopened.

Many of the disabled are still in the areas where they evacuated to, causing financial and medical concerns in those states. Others of the disabled, who lived at home prior to the evacuation, fear being institutionalized.

Children have not returned to New Orleans. Most public schools remain closed or have been converted into charter schools.

Before the storm there were 117 public schools with 60,000 students. In January 2006, there were 19 open, including 8 new charter schools, serving about 13,000 students.

Houston alone has nearly 20,000 evacuated students. The failure to reopen public schools in New Orleans has prompted litigation to force the charter and public schools to accept children.

Prisoners have again been left behind. Some of those evacuated were kept in jail long after their sentences had run. Only 7 of 42 public defenders have returned to represent the thousands still held in jail.

Even among homeowners, it is much more likely that white homeowners will have the chance to rebuild than black homeowners because of deep patterns of racial disparities in income - white median income is \$61,000 compared to black income of \$25,000.

Black businesses were severely impacted by Katrina. Rebuilding by homeowners in mostly black low-lying neighborhoods is much less likely at the time of the writing of this article because of bulldozing plans by the city and because rebuilding in those areas depends heavily on planning and homeowners insurance and flood insurance issues, many of which have yet to be resolved.

As a result, because renters, poor people and those without work are overwhelmingly African-American, "New Orleans is at risk of losing 80% of its black population."

"New Orleans is not going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again," Alphonso Jackson, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, told a Houston audience. Recall some of the characteristics of people who ended up in shelters, then compare to the situation currently in New Orleans:

64% were renters: now rents have skyrocketed and public housing is mostly closed;

22% had to care for someone who was physically unable to leave - now there are many fewer hospital beds;

52% had no health insurance - now the main center of public healthcare is closed;

76% had children under 18 with them in the shelter - most public schools are closed;

93% were black - the areas hit hardest were black and poor;

67% were employed full or part-time before the hurricane - there are now 200,000 fewer jobs than before the hurricane.

The people left behind in the rebuilding of New Orleans are the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, children, and prisoners, mostly African-American. Again left behind. The television showed who was left behind in the evacuation of New Orleans

after Katrina. There is no similar easy visual for those who are left behind now, but they are the same people.

There is not a sign outside of New Orleans saying "If you are poor, sick, elderly, disabled, children or African-American, you cannot return."

But there might as well be.

The people left behind in the evacuation of New Orleans after Katrina are the same people left behind in rebuilding of New Orleans; the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, and children, mostly African-American.

Now that we are back from Houston, Debbie has just started a new job at another hospital. I am fortunate enough to work at one of the universities which was not severely physically damaged by the storm and floods.

We are back. But where are our neighbors, the people we rode out of the city with? Where are the hundreds of thousands of our neighbors and will they ever be allowed to return?

Where is New Orleans now, and more important, where is it going to be?

Finally, if all levels of government and corporate power allow this to happen in New Orleans, do you think it will be any different in your city?

GET THE MESSAGE?

Indian Shiite Muslims protest against the U.S. in Bombay, India, Feb. 25, 2006.



(AP Photo/Rajesh Nirgude)



(AP Photo/Rajesh Nirgude)

Received:

“I Guess We Can Just Forget About All Of Those Other Atrocities Against Iraqis Now?”

From: C
Sent: February 23, 2006
Subject: the past is the past?

I heard an interview with an Iraqi official today on national public radio.

The interview was about the latest mosque attack, and the government official spent most of the interview pointing out how the Iraqis have the situation under control.

Despite the fact that he gave very good reason to believe that a lot of the media claims of violence were being hyped and exaggerated, the interviewer kept picking and poking at him, trying to harass him into saying that Iraqis couldn't deal with the situation.

I've heard this crap all over the american media today and I'm really surprised by it. The western media seems to really be relishing the possibility of chaos in Iraq. I even heard someone draw a comparison between the mosque destruction and the recent danish attack on the Prophet, peace be upon him; with a strange delight in the possibility that Muslims might turn that kind of outrage on each other.

Well, after starving a million Iraqis to death with sanctions over ten years, of which most of the victims were the most innocent and vulnerable; and after slaughtering tens of thousands more with the most hideous of tools of human depravity; and considering all of the other unrest and inequity that is flaring up all over the globe, with western media blacking almost all of it out, except for an occasional leak to glorify insults toward islam; I for one am glad to see that americans have come to appreciate the value of Iraqi lives, and are caring so much to protect them now.

I guess we can just forget about all of those other atrocities against Iraqis now?

Doesn't that just make sense?

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and inside the armed services. Send requests to address up top.

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

The following have posted issues; there may be others:

http://robinlea.com/GI_Special/, <http://qi-special.iraq-news.de>,

<http://www.williambowles.info/qispecial/2006/index.html>

http://www.traprockpeace.org/qi_special/, <http://www.uruknet.info/?p=-6&l=e>,

<http://www.albasrah.net/magalat/english/qi-special.htm>

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