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THE BEST WAR EVER

excerpted from the new book by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

During the buildup to war with Iraq, the Bush Administration did not merely say it *suspected* that Iraq had weapons. It claimed to know for certain, and even to know where they were located. “We do know, with absolute certainty,” said Dick Cheney, that Saddam Hussein “is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon.”

President Bush made the same claim in his televised address to the nation announcing the start of war: “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.”

The claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction was not just a component of the administration’s case for war. It was its *main* . . . *Continued on page 2*

FLACK ATTACK

With CMD’s hot-off-the-press *The Best War Ever: Lies, Damned Lies, and the Mess in Iraq* by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber (excerpts proudly presented herein), the atmosphere around the office of the Center for Media and Democracy has been downright electric. Add to that the Federal Communications Commission’s August 2006 demand to 77 TV news outlets for detailed information on corporate-funded video news releases that the stations presented as news (exposed, of course by our own Diane Farsetta and Daniel Price—see *PR Watch*, Vol. 14, No. 2). No “dog days of summer” this year—even if John has had to walk the dog anyway.

Providing a perfect lead-in to *The Best War Ever*, the *New York Times* reported on August 4 that the Bush Administration was attempting to classify most of a congressional study that examines the role of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) in selling the war to the American public. In our excerpted chapters “Big Impact,” “Rewriting History” and “Not Counting the Dead,” you will find parts of our own account of the White House whitewash on Iraq, including the sordid collaboration of the Rendon Group, Ahmed Chalabi

and the INC. You’ll want to read the entire account. After you read the excerpts in this issue, you can order a signed copy at www.thebestwarever.com.

CMD’s books and websites have helped make America aware that this war is driven by a dangerous elevation of propaganda over policy, and privatization of government functions that insulate the administration from accountability for its own decisions. Previous Congresses and presidents were aware of precisely these risks of propagandizing the public. In 1951, Congress began a tradition of forbidding government contractors (e.g. the INC) from using funds for domestic publicity or propaganda purposes, including lobbying Congress. Three years before that, Congress passed the Smith-Mundt Act, which outlawed domestic dissemination of U.S. government materials intended for foreign audiences. The only problem: federal courts have only allowed Congress the power to seek enforcement of this prohibition. Currently Congress is failing to police the executive branch and itself on foreign policy propaganda, and taxpayers cannot sue to enforce the government’s own promise to the American people.

Where does all this leave us (other than in a quagmire)? Read on . . .

argument. Three days before the commencement of fighting, Vice President Dick Cheney appeared on “Meet the Press” with Tim Russert. “What do you think is the most important rationale for going to war with Iraq?” Russert asked.

“Well, I think I’ve just given it, Tim,” Cheney replied, “in terms of the combination of his development and use of chemical weapons, his development of biological weapons, his pursuit of nuclear weapons.”

For many people, including journalists who traveled embedded with U.S. troops in Iraq, the Bush administration’s confident affirmations of certainty seemed to have an almost hypnotic effect. Over the course of the next several months, soldiers and their accompanying reporters kept seeking—and in many cases, finding—mysterious hints, suspicious items and tantalizing clues that seemed to be the “smoking gun” that would prove once and for all that Iraq harbored banned weapons. The discoveries were treated on page one in major newspapers and as breaking news on television. Later, when it came time to admit that these discoveries were mistaken, the retractions were buried on inside pages or omitted altogether.

- On March 28, 2003 NBC correspondent David Bloom reported “a bit of a chemical weapons scare” when “US military intelligence picked up what they suspected to be three possibly mobile chemical/biological trucks.” The tanker trucks were bombed by U.S. aircraft and spent the rest of the day burning, suggesting that they probably contained fuel rather than chemical or biological agents.
- That same day, the *New York Times* cited intelligence reports from Army officials that Saddam Hussein was setting up a ring of chemical weapons—a “red line” defense—to surround Baghdad and “strongly believed that Mr. Hussein would use the weapons as allied troops moved toward Baghdad to oust him and his government.” This also turned out to be a mirage.
- On April 7, MSNBC’s Dana Lewis reported the discovery in Karbala of “chemical barrels in an agricultural factory. . . . They have run tests on this. And what they have found is sarin and tabun, which are nerve agents. And we are also told that they have found a mustard-type agent.” News reports also noted that several soldiers in the vicinity had collapsed, adding to suspicions that they had been exposed to a chemical agent. *The Miami Herald* carried a headline declaring, “Discovery at Village the Strongest Signs of Toxins Yet.” Further tests showed that the barrels contained farm pesticides. Troops also found pamphlets describ-

ing how to deal with mosquitoes, and it turned out that the soldiers who collapsed had suffered heat stroke. A few British newspapers carried the correction that WMDs had not been found after all, but the correction was omitted altogether or buried near the bottom of stories in U.S. newspapers, which by then were agog with other new and alarming discoveries—discoveries that also led nowhere in the end.

FOX TROTS

The Fox News network had the dubious honor of reporting more WMD discoveries than any other network. Its sensational reports from Iraq were so popular with conservative viewers that it won the cable ratings war during the invasion of Iraq, even though Fox had a smaller contingent of correspondents actually reporting from the battlefield than any of the others. At the time of the Iraq war, Fox News had just 1,250 full-time and freelance employees and 17 news bureaus, only six of them overseas, with operating costs of about \$250 million. By contrast, CNN had 4,000 employees and 42 bureaus, 31 of them overseas, at a cost of about \$800 million. In the Middle East, Fox had only 15 correspondents, compared to at least 100 apiece for ABC, CBS, NBC and BBC. As U.S. tanks rolled on Baghdad, Fox was forced to purchase video footage of Baghdad from Al-Jazeera, the Arab network.

“We don’t have the resources overseas that CNN and other networks have,” admitted Fox correspondent Rick Leventhal, who was with the First Marine Light Armor Reconnaissance unit. “We’re going in with less money and equipment and people, and trying to do the same job. You might call it smoke and mirrors, but it’s working.” The “smoke and mirrors” consisted of opinionated pundits and studio consultants, who filled the gaps left by their limited reporting from the field with a free-wheeling mix of wild speculation, embellishments of reports from other journalists, and outright fantasy.

On March 23, the Associated Press reported that troops had found a “suspected chemical plant” near the city of Najaf, noting that the discovery had not been confirmed. Fox News announced the story by running headline banners that said, “HUGE CHEMICAL WEAPONS FACTORY FOUND IN SO IRAQ.... REPORTS: 30 IRAQIS SURRENDER AT CHEM WEAPONS PLANT.... COAL TROOPS HOLDING IRAQI IN CHARGE OF CHEM WEAPONS.”

The story on their website said the discovery had been confirmed by “a senior Pentagon official.” Fox anchor Linda Vester told viewers, “this validates President Bush’s argument with the UN. . . . This is proof that

Saddam has been hiding weapons of mass destruction.” The following morning, Pentagon officials backed away from the story. No chemicals had been found there at all, in what appeared upon examination to be a long-abandoned facility.

On April 10, 2003 an embedded reporter from the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* wrote that “a quick inspection” by Army specialists at the Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Center had sparked suspicions that the site “harbors weapons-grade plutonium.” Prior to 1991, the Tuwaitha facility had been part of Iraq’s nuclear weapons program, but it was bombed by the United States during Operation Desert Storm and subsequently monitored and regulated by the IAEA. Fox News recycled the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* story into a “breaking news” special, featuring interviews with stateside military analysts and a scientist who said, “I think this demonstrates the failure of the U.N. weapons inspections and demonstrates that our guys are going to find the weapons of mass destruction.”

Neither Fox nor the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* mentioned that the Tuwaitha facility had actually been subject to continuous on-site UN monitoring for years. And Fox did not bother correcting the record when, days later, further investigations found no evidence of plutonium or other banned activities.

Also on April 10, Fox reported the discovery of a small, shot-up, tan-colored truck that they described as “a mobile unit, disguised as . . . a surface-to-air missile radar truck. . . . Upon closer inspection, they discovered a false wall. What was behind that false wall? Well, all sorts of material that would suggest this was, in fact, a

chemical-biological weapons mobile lab. Winches to lift things up, areas to cool and to warm certain things. Bottles, test tubes. Other materials suggestive of the presence at some point in the past of weapons that could have been used in a chemical or biological attack. . . . This could be the first explicit piece of evidence that a mobile-chemical-biological weapons truck existed. And it was right in the heart of Baghdad. And as Rick Leventhal reported, at least when it was discovered, less than half a block from the U.N. offices where weapons inspectors had once worked.”

The following day, Fox interviewed G. Gordon Liddy, who boasted that the “biolab special truck was discovered by my son, Major Ray Liddy in the Marine Corps, his unit, 23rd Marines, 2nd Battalion. . . . But guess who that specialized truck was traced to, who manufactured it for them? The French.” After some general ridicule of France, Democrats and peaceniks in San Francisco, Fox co-host Alan Colmes was allowed to counter, “I think they’ve decided it is not a weapons of mass destruction mobile lab.” Nothing further has ever been heard about the little tan truck.

On May 8, another Fox analyst, retired general Paul Vallely, told Bill O’Reilly he had evidence that the WMD’s had been smuggled into Syria and were buried 30 to 40 meters underground in the Bekaa Valley. He added that the government of France had provided forged passports to help Saddam flee the country. “Let me stop you,” O’Reilly interrupted. “Do you really believe there’s going to be conclusive proof, General, do you believe there is going to be conclusive proof that

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France helped Saddam Hussein and his thugs escape? Do you believe that will come out?"

"Absolutely," Valley replied. "There is enough information, Bill, that I'm getting coming out that is going to bury and break the Chirac government."

"Wow!" said O'Reilly.

Eight months later, Saddam Hussein was captured inside Iraq in an underground "spider hole" near his home town of Tikrit. Evidently his wine-swilling, brie-eating French accomplices were so fearful upon being exposed by the intrepid journalists at Fox that they smuggled the tyrant back into Iraq to face his fate.

WMD OR NOT TO BE

Shortly after the fall of Baghdad, a survey conducted by the University of Maryland found that 34 percent of Americans believed weapons of mass destruction had actually been found in Iraq, and 22 percent believed that WMDs had actually been used during the war. Sixty percent, moreover, believed that evidence of Iraq having WMDs was the most important reason to go to war. "Given the intensive news coverage and high levels of public attention to the topic, this level of misinformation suggests that some Americans may be avoiding having an experience of cognitive dissonance," suggested survey director Steven Kull. Given the type of reporting we have described above, however, another likely possibility is that Americans got their misinformation from the news coverage they witnessed.

Given the extraordinary importance placed on WMDs as a rationale for war, the belief in their existence could not be abandoned easily or quickly. In the absence of actual weapons, the website of the U.S. Department of Defense posted photographs of chemical suits, Geiger counters and gas masks found in Iraq—evidence, they said, that the regime must have weapons as well. As it became increasingly clear that actual weapons were not going to be found, administration officials adopted strategies aimed at buying time while they recalibrated their rhetoric to lower the expectations that they had previously raised.

Washington Post reporter Barton Gellman accompanied some of the weapons hunters and witnessed their findings. At one suspected weapons site, they found a cache of vacuum cleaners, air conditioners and rolls of fabric; at another, a distillery; at another, a swimming pool; a middle school for girls; a factory that manufactured license plates. Sometimes the weapons teams found suspicious-looking items, but upon examination the discoveries turned out to be innocuous. After some initial excitement about a document that included

THE BEST WAR EVER

Lies, Damned Lies, and the Mess in Iraq



Sheldon Rampton & John Stauber
bestselling authors of *Weapons of Mass Deception*

The Best War Ever: Lies, Damned Lies and the Mess in Iraq

by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

Available in bookstores everywhere

and at www.thebestwarever.com on September 14th

Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber told us so. The first authors to expose the blatant deceptions that got us into the Iraq War reveal how the same lies have led us toward defeat.

The Best War Ever is about a conflict that was devised in fantasy and lost in delusion. The war in Iraq may be remembered as the point at which the propaganda model perfected in the twentieth century stopped working: The world is too complex, information is too plentiful, and propaganda makes bad policy.

Even now that public opinion is turning against the war, the Bush administration and its allies continue their attempts at cover-ups: downplaying civilian deaths and military injuries; employing marketing buzzwords like "victory" again and again to shore up public opinion; and failed attempts, through third-party PR firms, at creating phony news. Now that even US generals agree that war critics were right in the first place, Rampton and Stauber show us how to wake up and not be misled again.

sketches of laboratory flasks, the soldiers realized that all they had uncovered was “some kid’s high school science project,” Gellman reported. And so it went: “Another day brought ‘suspicious glass globes,’ filled, as it turned out, with cleaning fluid. A drum of foul-smelling liquid revealed itself as used motor oil.”



Former Secretary of State Colin Powell, making the case for invading Iraq to the United Nations on Feb. 5, 2003. Using a small vial to dramatize the danger of anthrax, he claimed that Iraq harbored some 8,500 liters of anthrax since 1991.

The last notable claim that WMDs had actually been found came in May 2003 after troops found a couple of mobile trailers in northern Iraq whose design loosely resembled the design for mobile bioweapons laboratories that Colin Powell had displayed during his speech to the United Nations. Following the usual script for such discoveries, NBC News correspondent Jim Avila reported from Baghdad that the trailers “may be the most significant WMD findings of the war.” The CIA rushed out an analysis claiming that the trailers found in Iraq were indeed biowarfare labs. After examining the trailers, however, a team of engineering experts from the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency disagreed, as did a report published two weeks later by British analysts. “They are not mobile germ warfare laboratories,” said a British scientist. “You could not use them for making biological weapons. They do not even look like them. They are exactly what the Iraqis said they were—facilities for the production of hydrogen gas to fill balloons.”

The Bush administration continued to insist that the trailers were bioweapons labs for months in the face of accumulating evidence to the contrary. By July 2003, however, their own chief weapons inspector on the ground in Iraq had backed away from the story, calling it a “fiasco.”

SHUT UP AND WAIT

In August 2003, the Pentagon adopted a new strategy, called the “big impact” plan. According to *Washington Times* columnists Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, “The plan calls for gathering and holding on to all the information now being collected about the weapons. Rather than releasing its findings piecemeal, defense officials will release a comprehensive report on the arms, perhaps six months from now. The goal of the strategy will be to quiet critics of the Bush administration who said claims of Iraq’s hidden weapons stockpiles were exaggerated in order to go to war.”

At a news conference, Bush said, “It’s going to take time for us to gather the evidence and analyze the mounds of evidence, literally, the miles of documents that we have uncovered. . . . And it’s just going to take awhile, and I’m confident the truth will come out.” At the same time, a subtle but telling change entered his rhetoric. Whereas previously, he had talked about actual *weapons*, instead he began talking about a weapons *program*. “I’m confident,” he said, “that our search will yield that which I strongly believe, that Saddam had a weapons program.”

David Kay, a former U.N. inspector and supporter of the war with Iraq, was appointed as a special advisor to the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), the U.S. team assigned to replace the 75th Exploitation Task Force in the hunt for WMDs. To find the weapons, the ISG had a staff of 1,200 people and a budget of \$300 million.

On “Newshour with Jim Lehrer,” Condoleezza Rice explained the plan: “What the president said to David Kay is, take your time; do this in a comprehensive way; do this in a way that makes the case, that looks at all of the evidence, and then tells us the truth about this program,” Rice said. “What David Kay did say to me and to others is that this is a program that was built for deception over many, many years. . . . And so it’s not surprising that it’s going to take some time to really put this picture together. David Kay is going to put this together in a way that is coherent. I think that there is a danger in taking a little piece of evidence here, a little piece of evidence there. He is a very respected and capable weapons inspector. He knows how to read the Iraqi programs. . . . We will put this case together.”

In reality, “big impact” was simply another catchphrase. Like “shock and awe,” it sounded impressive, but it was simply an effort to buy time and deflect attention away from the failure to actually find the weapons. The White House said it would take at least six months before the public should expect to see Kay’s report. During that period, the Bush team could hope that public attention

would wander elsewhere, while they adjusted their rhetoric to lower expectations about whatever they eventually offered as “proof.”

Almost immediately after Kay arrived in Iraq, he realized that what he was looking for wasn't there. “Every weekend I wrote a private e-mail to the [Director of Central Intelligence] and the [Deputy Director of Central Intelligence], my unvarnished summary of where we were,” Kay later told a reporter. “I wrote that it looks as though they did not produce weapons.”

In September 7, 2003, the White House announced that David Kay was about to present a preliminary report to Congress on the findings of the Iraq Survey Group. A week later, however, word leaked out that the progress report had been delayed and that Kay was finding so little of substance that a final report might never be published.

On October 2, Kay finally delivered the interim report and tried to put the best face on things. “We have not yet found stocks of weapons, but we are not yet at the point where we can say definitively either that such weapon stocks do not exist,” he said.

The claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction was not just a component of the administration's case for war. It was its main argument.

The White House continued to fuzz up its rhetoric. Previously it had gone from declaring that Iraq had weapons to talking about weapons programs. Now it was reduced to talking of “program-related activities” and evidence of mere *intent* to re-launch weapons programs at some unspecified moment in the future. But was something as vague as a dictator's possible future dreams sufficient cause to justify a war?

Realizing that the search was fruitless, David Kay tried to resign from the Iraq Survey Group in December 2003, but he delayed his announcement at the request of CIA director George Tenet, who told him, “If you resign now it will appear like we don't know what we're doing and the wheels are coming off.” He waited to resign publicly until January 23—three days after Bush's state of the union address. A few days later, he testified before the U.S. Senate about his findings. “Let me begin by saying, we were almost all wrong, and I certainly include myself here,” he said.

Following Kay's resignation, Charles Duelfer was appointed to complete the work of the Iraq Survey Group. Its final report, published on September 30,

2004, devoted most of its pages to damning assessments of Saddam Hussein's personality, the brutal nature of his dictatorship, and his history of past deceptions and weapons-related activities. It spoke of Iraq's “byzantine setting,” “culture of lies,” “command by violence,” “mutuality of fear,” “Saddam's psychology,” and “veiled WMD intent.” In the end, though, the report admitted, “ISG has not found evidence that Saddam Husayn possessed WMD stocks in 2003.” At most, the report left open “the possibility that some weapons existed in Iraq although not of a militarily significant capability.”

Whereas once the United States had sought weapons, now the government turned to seeking the source of the illusion that weapons ever existed. Here too, the searchers seemed unable to find what they were looking for. President Bush appointed a “Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction” After a year of poring through evidence and interviewing experts, the commission issued a 601-page report, which concluded that pre-war assessments of Iraqi weapons were “all wrong” and that the “harm done to American credibility by our all too public intelligence failings in Iraq will take years to undo.”

To prevent similar failings in the future, the commission called for “forging an integrated intelligence community,” restructuring the management of U.S. intelligence operations, and having the White House “improve its mechanisms for watching over the Intelligence Community.”

However, the commission made no effort to even ask whether existing White House “mechanisms for watching over the intelligence community” might have actually been part of the problem. Its recommendations for administrative reform were so general, impersonal and structural in nature that no individuals could be held to account. No one lost their job. No one was indicted, accused, reprimanded or disciplined.

CIA Director George Tenet had overseen U.S. intelligence reports on Iraq that the commission now called “a major intelligence failure” of a magnitude that “we simply cannot afford.” Rather than disgrace, Bush gave him the Presidential Medal of Honor. ■

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or to book a speaker, contact the
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REWRITING HISTORY

by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

Since the war in Iraq began in 2003, the Bush administration's rhetoric has shifted in directions that undermine its original case for war. During the initial buildup to war, the main arguments were:

1. We know that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction.
2. Saddam Hussein is allied with Al Qaeda.
3. The people will welcome American troops as liberators, so the war will be a "cakewalk" and the post-invasion occupation will be brief.

These arguments have now shifted to the following:

1. We were wrong about our intelligence assessments, but so was everyone else.
2. We can't leave now, or the terrorists will win.
3. If we leave now, all the lives and money we've spent will have been wasted.

Each of these arguments is also deceptive, but before considering the specifics of *how* they are misleading, it is worth noting that each of the current arguments is a pale and unconvincing version of the original case for war. The Bush administration has been forced to fall back on these weaker arguments because it has no choice. Reality is sinking in, even at the top levels of government.

Let's look at each of the Bush administration's current arguments in turn:

"WE WERE WRONG, BUT SO WAS EVERYBODY ELSE."

It is true that many (though not all) analysts outside the White House expected that chemical or biological weapons would be found in Iraq, but there was little expectation that they would be found in the alarming quantities that the Bush administration talked about. Experts were especially skeptical about White House claims that Iraq was attempting to develop nuclear weapons.

It is also true that many leading Democratic politicians supported the Bush administration's drive to war, but members of Congress did not have access to the same intelligence information as the White House. Congress received summaries, provided by the White House, from which the details and grounds for skepticism had been removed.

Finally, of course, there are any number of commentators in the United States and elsewhere who questioned the case for war before it happened. Conservative skeptics included Patrick Buchanan; Brent Scowcroft

(the former national security advisor to the first President Bush); retired general William Odom (a former national security advisory to President Reagan); and Lawrence Eagleburger, who had served as secretary of state for the senior Bush. Chuck Hagel, the Republican senator from Nebraska, also questioned the rationale for war, saying there was "absolutely no evidence" that Iraq possessed a nuclear capability.

The Bush administration has been forced to fall back on these weaker arguments because it has no choice. Reality is sinking in, even at the top levels of government.

Many individual analysts within the U.S. intelligence community also questioned the White House case for war. According to Paul Pillar, who was the intelligence community's senior analyst for the Middle East at the time of the invasion of Iraq, "official intelligence was not relied on in making even the most significant national security decisions. . . . If the entire body of official intelligence analysis on Iraq had a policy implication, it was to avoid war—or, if war was going to be launched, to prepare for a messy aftermath. . . . The administration used intelligence not to inform decision-making, but to justify a decision already made."

During the buildup to war, said an intelligence official interviewed by the Knight-Ridder news agency, analysts in the intelligence community were feeling strong pressure from the Pentagon to cook the intelligence books. Knight-Ridder spoke to "a dozen other officials" who "echoed his views," although none would agree to speak publicly under their own names, for fear of retribution.

When they disagree with their boss, people who work for a government agency like the CIA are not terribly different from people who work for an HMO or an airline or a restaurant. They have bills to pay, career ambitions, concerns about their mortgage, children's college fund—all of the mundane reasons that motivate people to "go along to get along" even when they see something they don't like. In the case of Iraq, however, dissent from the White House party line was so strong that a number of career intelligence officials chose to resign rather than echo the party line.

- Greg Thielmann retired in September 2002 after 25 years in the State Department, the last four in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

- Richard A. Clarke, the counter-terrorism advisor on the U.S. National Security Council, resigned in January 2003 and wrote a book, *Against All Enemies*, which argued that the war in Iraq was a fatal diversion from the effort against terrorism.
- Rand Beers, a top White House counterterrorism advisor who had served under presidents Clinton and Reagan as well as both Bushes, quit five days before the start of war and volunteered to serve as a counterterrorism advisor to the presidential campaign of John Kerry.

The Bush administration's current claim that "everybody else was wrong too" relies heavily on the failure of the U.S. news media to do a responsible job of reporting during the runup to war and the war itself. A study done in 2003 by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting showed an overwhelming preponderance of pro-war viewpoints in television coverage of the war. It tabulated 1,617 on-camera sources that appeared in stories about Iraq according to their occupation, nationality and position on the war and found that 64 percent of sources were pro-war, while anti-war voices were only 10 percent of sources. Among U.S. sources, only 3 percent were anti-war—this at a time when dissent was quite visible in U.S. society, with large anti-war demonstrations across the country and 27 percent of the public telling pollsters they opposed the war." Moreover, "Guests with anti-war viewpoints were almost universally allowed one-sentence soundbites taken from interviews conducted on the street. Not a single show in the study conducted a sit-down interview with a person identified as being against the war."

Marianne Manilov, who worked as a communications consultant to U.S. peace groups, remembers that during the buildup to war she tried to persuade U.S. news programs to feature guests who would offer a critical perspective. The guests that she offered included university scholars and other experts with impressive credentials. These guests were widely rejected. Instead, the anti-war voices that appeared in the media consisted of protesters at rallies and—eventually—a few Hollywood celebrities such as Sean Penn, Susan Sarandon or Janeane Garofalo. These programming choices delivered an implicit message that only scruffy radicals and Hollywood celebrities opposed the war.

Even so, it is instructive in retrospect to see what those voices said then and how well it stacks up against what everyone now knows to be the truth. Here, for example, is an excerpt from an interview that Janeane Garofalo

gave on Fox News in February 2003, less than a month before the invasion began:

I think lots of people are eager to obtain weapons of mass destruction. But there's no evidence that [Saddam Hussein] has weapons of mass destruction. There's been no evidence of him testing nuclear weapons. We have people that are in our face with nuclear weapons. We've got Iran and North Korea. We've got a problem with Pakistan. ... There's a whole lot of people that are going nuclear. And I think that Saddam Hussein is actually, with the evidence, the least able to use nuclear weapons and the least obvious offender in that area at this moment. ...

This is going to be economically devastating for us. And also, the assertion that inaction breeds terrorist strikes, that is ridiculous. Action in Iraq will make us decidedly less safe.



In a 2002 appearance on Fox News, Garofalo said that invading Iraq "destabilizes the Middle East further."

How is it that Janeane Garofalo had a better analysis of Iraq's weapons programs than the combined forces of the White House, U.S. intelligence agencies and leading U.S. news media? Certainly it is not because she had more information than they did. Her superior analysis was based solely on her ability to think and reason independently, unfettered by the propaganda and groupthink that has become the norm in government and elite media circles that shape and inform public policy.

"WE CAN'T LEAVE NOW, OR THE TERRORISTS WILL WIN."

The original rationale for war, of course, was that invading Iraq would get rid of terrorists. Instead, the occupation of Iraq provided a staging-ground for what have now become daily terrorist attacks against U.S. soldiers and Iraqi civilians alike. Worse still, it has become a place where terrorists are developing skills and contacts that they will likely use to attack other targets in places such as Europe and the United States.

Remarkably, the Bush administration has offered these attacks as signs of progress in the war on terror. “We are fighting them in Iraq so that we don’t have to fight them at home,” Bush declared—an argument that prompted some supporters of the war to begin describing Iraq as “carefully hung flypaper” where terrorists could be lured, trapped, and disposed of.

Journalist Joshua Micah Marshall, however, offered a different metaphor, arguing that the “flypaper” theory should really be called the “dirty hospital” approach to fighting terror: “By creating a dirty hospital, we’re going to create a place where we can fight the germs on our terms.” Creating a dirty hospital just provides a place where more germs can breed, and turning Iraq into a hotbed of terrorism has merely provided an opportunity for terrorists to meet, multiply, and practice their craft on live targets.

This outcome is precisely what opponents of the war warned about from the start. In our 2003 book, *Weapons of Mass Deception*, we concluded by quoting the words of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (a U.S. ally). As the war commenced in March of that year, Mubarak predicted that “there will be 100 bin Ladens afterward.”

The available statistical evidence suggests that this warning was correct. Each year since 1985, the U.S. Department of State has been required to publish an annual report, titled *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, which tracks countries and groups involved in international terrorism. The 2004 edition tallied attacks for 2003, the first year of the war in Iraq. That year saw 175 significant terrorist attacks (defined as attacks in which lives are lost or there is injury and property damage of more than \$10,000)—the largest number of significant terrorist attacks since 1982.

In 2004, the numbers were even worse — 651 significant terrorist attacks, nearly four times the amount of the previous year, with 1,907 people killed and 9,300 wounded—roughly a tripling of the previous year’s casualty toll. Iraq alone saw 198 attacks that year—nearly the worldwide total for 2003—but even if all of those attacks were omitted, the number of terrorist attacks in the rest of the world was still more than double the all-time record.

It should be noted, moreover, that the 651 terrorist attacks tallied for 2004 did not include attacks on U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq, or even attacks on Iraqi civilians by other Iraqis. The long-standing US definition of international terrorism, used by *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, defined it as violent acts against non-combatants, and it has to involve the territory or citizens of more than one country. (Timothy McVeigh’s 1995 bombing

of the federal building in Oklahoma City would also not fit this definition of terrorism.) The National Counterterrorism Center, a government agency created by President Bush in 2004, has compiled a separate report that does include other incidents not previously classed as terrorism (although attacks on soldiers are still excluded). Using this more inclusive definition, the number of terrorist incidents in 2004 would be 3,192.

At a June 2005 Department of Defense briefing, not long after Vice President Dick Cheney declared that the insurgents in Iraq were “in their last throes,” Lieutenant General James Conway noted that terrorist skills learned in Iraq were being transferred to Afghanistan, where it was “a little bit troubling” to see an increased use of improvised explosives devices (IEDs) due in part to “cross-pollination between the people in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Classified studies by the CIA and the State Department have leaked to the press, showing that that Iraq has become something it was not before the war began: “the prime training ground for foreign terrorists who could travel elsewhere across the globe and wreak havoc.”

“IF WE LEAVE NOW, ALL THE LIVES AND MONEY WE’VE SPENT WILL HAVE BEEN WASTED.”

This argument, of course, begins by admitting that quite a bit of life and money has been lost already. It takes as its premise facts that contradict the earlier, rosy pronouncements of Bush administration officials and pro-war pundits who predicted that the war would be “a cakewalk” (in the words of Kenneth Adelman) or “quicker and easier than many people think” (in the words of Richard Perle).

Perhaps the most optimistic assessment came from Vice President Dick Cheney, in an interview with Tim Russert on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” Russert asked about General Eric Shinseki’s statement that several hundred thousand troops would need to remain in Iraq for several years to maintain stability. “I disagree,” Cheney said, calling Shinseki’s assessment “an overstatement. . . .” “I don’t think it’s likely to unfold that way, Tim, because I really do believe that we will be greeted as liberators.”

These predictions of a quick, easy war had consequences. Americans gambled on a losing bet, and they have had to pay for that gamble with treasure and with blood. To say now that those costs have been so high that we need to keep playing until we win is a classic gambler’s fallacy. Just as a gambler has no guarantee that staying at the table will win back his losses, we have no reason to expect that remaining in Iraq will bring victory. To the

contrary, it is likely that the longer we stay, the worse the ultimate reckoning will be.

Retired U.S. General William Odom is a Republican who formerly headed the National Security Agency under Ronald Reagan and also served as a deputy National Security Adviser. In April 2004—well ahead of John Murtha or other leading Democrats, who only began talking about troop withdrawal in late 2005—Odom argued that the United States needed to remove its forces “from that shattered country as rapidly as possible.” The only issue yet to settle, he said, “is how high a price we’re going to pay—less, by getting out sooner, or more, by getting out later.”

Odom elaborated further in an interview with Katie Couric on the “Today” show. “But General Odom, as you well know, many people will say the United States simply cannot up and leave,” Couric said. “What will it do for the reputation of this country around the world

... if the administration doesn’t have the stick-to-it-ness, if you will, to get the job done, to continue what was started in the first place?”

“We have already failed. Staying in longer makes us fail worse,” Odom replied. “If we blindly say we should stick to it, we’re misusing our power and we’re making it worse. Let me put it more bluntly. Let’s suppose you murdered somebody, and you suddenly look and say, ‘We can’t afford to have murdered this person, so therefore let’s save him.’ I think we’ve passed the chances to not fail. And now we are in a situation where we have to limit the damage. And the issue is just how much we are going to pay before we decide to limit the damage, not rescue ourselves by throwing good money after bad.”

At the time that Odom said those words, 725 American soldiers had died in Iraq. Since then, the toll has more than tripled. ■

CMD IN THE NEWS

The Center for Media and Democracy continues to provide a leading voice nationally and internationally in identifying manipulative PR and propaganda. Here are a few examples of recent media appearances of the Center and its staff:

- CMD Executive Director John Stauber was prominently featured in a July 31, 2006, *USA Today* article about anti-union, business lobby darling Rick Berman. Berman “obviously has made a very monetarily successful career out of bashing, smearing and attacking environmentalists,” John told reporter Jayne O’Donnell. John was also prominently quoted in a *Buffalo News* investigation of June 25, 2006, outing “Vets for Truth” as a Republican front organization built in the mold of Swift Boat Vets for Freedom.
- Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta continues to be the leading national voice on “fake news,” as her report with Research Associate Daniel Price on corporate-sponsored video news releases reverberates through government and the TV news industry. She was interviewed on NPR/Marketplace and in the *Washington Post* on August 15, 2006, not to mention nationwide via Associated Press wire stories the next day. “We think that the [Federal Communications Commission] investigation is really important because otherwise stations won’t take seriously the disclosure laws that are already on the books,” she told the *Post*. The story has had broad local reach, as well, from the *Terre Haute Tribune Star* and *The Courier News* of Elgin IL to tech industry website www.redherring.com, which paraphrased a PR industry executive as saying that the FCC investigation is “a major victory for CMD.”
- Research Director Sheldon Rampton was interviewed by Washington Dateline columnist James Crawley on July 11, 2006, about the Pentagon’s own television news service that broadcasts in the U.S. as well as abroad. “It really does blur the line between propaganda and news when you have any government agency, but especially the military, producing news that’s intended for the general population,” Sheldon noted. Sheldon’s CMD blog “Haji Girl,” about the violent and racist lyrics in a U.S. soldier’s song from the front, was picked up as a lead article on www.alternet.org and received some 200 comments.
- Meanwhile, CMD’s new wiki-based investigative website on all members of Congress, Congresspedia.org, led by editor Conor Kenny, received prominent mention in the *The Hill* (July 11, 2006), and the *Washington Post* (April 26, 2006). CMD cosponsors the site with the Sunlight Foundation.

NOT COUNTING THE DEAD

by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

During the initial invasion phase of the war in Iraq, the low number of U.S. and coalition casualties made it possible to imagine that the war would be a relatively blood-free affair. U.S. forces combined devastating aerial attacks with overwhelming technological superiority in ground operations to crush their Iraqi opponents. The march to Baghdad was so rapid that the main problem encountered by troops was the difficulty maintaining adequate deliveries of food and fuel at the front of the line. By the time President Bush declared an “end to major combat operations in Iraq” on May 1, 2003, only 173 coalition troops had died—140 Americans and 33 British.

Bush also used the occasion to praise the modern technology of war, which he claimed had helped protect Iraq’s civilian population: “With new tactics and precision weapons, we can achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians,” he said. “No device of man can remove the tragedy from war; yet it is a great moral advance when the guilty have far more to fear from war than the innocent.”

The government was not merely determined to minimize the number of dead. It also worked to minimize reporting on the deaths that did occur. On the eve of war in March 2003, the Pentagon sent a directive to U.S. military bases. “There will be no arrival ceremonies for, or media coverage of, deceased military personnel returning to or departing from Ramstein [Germany] airbase or Dover [Del.] base, to include interim stops,” it stated.

By the summer of 2003, however, the euphoria of victory began to fade as a steady trickle of new casualties in Iraq demonstrated that the invasion of Iraq was only a prelude to the real war of occupation. By July 17, the Pentagon reported another 33 combat deaths since the “end of major combat.” U.S. publications began to periodically update the death toll for U.S. soldiers, and local newspapers reported on individual deaths as they occurred. In the spring of 2003, CNN and the *Washington Post* launched special sections on their websites that provided photographs and names of U.S. and coalition casualties. A similar memorial was begun in December 2003 by the *Army Times*, a civilian newspaper that is sold mainly on military bases. It used eight pages of its year-end review to run photos of the more than 500 soldiers who had died by then in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the paper’s managing editor, Robert Hoderne, getting the photos was a struggle because “The military doesn’t give out so many photos of the dead.”

In April 2004, a month that saw the deaths of 140 soldiers, Americans finally saw their first images of flag-

THE BEST WAR EVER

Lies, Damned Lies, and the Mess in Iraq


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Visit www.thebestwarever.com

To help build anti-war momentum, CMD has hired Matt Thompson to produce a powerful online video based on *The Best War Ever: Lies, Damned Lies and the Mess in Iraq*. The video, along with an excerpt from the book, is available for viewing at www.thebestwarever.com.

We want this book not just to explain the war, but bring it to an end. We have therefore joined with Voters for Peace to tell politicians that they will be held accountable for their support of war, or rewarded for their stand for peace. Please join us in signing a pledge telling your elected representatives that you intend to make war the key issue in November’s midterm election.

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draped coffins returning from Iraq. The photo was not taken by a journalist, however. It was taken by Tami Sili-cio of Seattle, Washington, who worked with her husband for Maytag Aircraft, a private company that handled cargo shipments for the U.S. military. On April 7, the cargo consisted of coffins being loaded for their

journey back to the states. Using her digital camera, Silicio took photos of the scene and emailed them to a friend back home with a note that said, "Last night at work we sent home 22." Moved by the power of the image, her friend took the photo to the *Seattle Times*, which asked for permission to print the photo in their April 18 edition.

"I didn't have any aspirations of sending my picture to the paper, but I agreed to publish it because I felt that if families knew how well their loved ones were being treated on the way home, it would help comfort them in a time when nothing else can," Silicio said. Its publication, however, brought retaliation. Under pressure from the Pentagon, Silicio's employer fired her along with her husband, although her photo prompted an outpouring of supportive letters and phone calls from *Seattle Times* readers.

Silicio's photo also set off a chain of events that helped raise the profile of anti-war sentiments in the United States. Although some people criticized the decision to publish the photo, several parents of fallen soldiers told reporters that they wanted newspapers to publish photos documenting their pain and sacrifice. One of those was Bill Mitchell, whose son Michael had died in Sadr City on April 4.

"I am quite positive that he was inside one of those coffins in the picture," Mitchell wrote in a letter to *Seattle Times* reporter Hal Bernton. "I am happy that you ran the story and showed the picture. I would like everyone to know the devastation that this event has brought upon Mike's family and friends."

The death of his son also helped introduce Bill Mitchell to another grieving parent—Cindy Sheehan, whose son Casey was killed in Sadr City on the same day as Mike Mitchell and whose body was on the same flight. The two soldiers had not known each other in life, but their deaths brought their parents together. A year later, Sheehan would lead a growing protest vigil outside Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas, and Bill Mitchell flew in from California to stand by her side.

THE MEMORY HOLE

As it turns out, the same government that objected to Tami Silicio's photograph was shooting hundreds of pictures of soldiers' caskets and quietly filing them away. The government photos were uncovered, not by the traditional news media but by a website run by a single individual — Russ Kick's *TheMemoryHole.org*, which archives government files, corporate memos, court documents, and other "material that is in danger of being lost, is hard to find, or is not widely known." After Kick

learned of the government ban on distributing photos of caskets, he filed a request under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act in November 2003, asking for "all photographs showing caskets (or other devices) containing the remains of US military personnel at Dover AFB." His request was rejected, but he appealed the ruling and won. On April 14, 2004, the Air Force sent him a CD containing 361 digital photographs, which he promptly added to his website. The incident, according to former Minneapolis newspaper reporter Steve Yelvington, demonstrated "that freedom of the press belongs to the people, not just to corporations, and that sunshine laws are for all of us, not just for the press."

On April 30, 2004, the controversy over mentioning the dead spilled onto television, when Ted Koppel's 'Nightline' program on ABC News ran a program titled "The Fallen," which consisted of Koppel simply reading the names of the 721 U.S. soldiers who had died by then in Iraq, as their faces flashed briefly on the screen.

Supporters of the war denounced these references to the dead, saying that were insensitive, disrespectful and intended to undermine support for the war. Actually, though, the images of flag-draped coffins and still photos of the faces of the dead that have appeared in U.S. news media have been exercises in minimalism compared to the photos that have been published from previous wars. During the U.S. Civil War, for example, Matthew Brady took photographs of bodies sprawled across the battlefield at Antietam that more graphic and shocking to the viewers who saw them. "Let him who wishes to know what war is look at this series of illustrations," commented Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. (the father of the future U.S. Supreme Court justice) after viewing Brady's photos. "It was so nearly like visiting the battlefield to look over these views, that all the emotions excited by the actual sight of the stained and sordid scene, strewn with rags and wrecks, came back to us. . . . [It] gives us . . . some conception of what a repulsive, brutal, sickening, hideous thing it is, this dashing together of two frantic mobs to which we give the name of armies."

THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN CIVILIAN

At least the American dead were *counted*. The same cannot be said for Iraqis. There is a difference between the importance that Americans accorded to their own casualties and the way they thought about others, and that difference was reflected in media coverage. Although U.S. government officials made an effort to minimize publicity about American casualties, the deaths nevertheless were tallied. On any given day, it was possible to find an exact number. Websites such as the Iraq Coali-

tion Casualty Count (www.icasualties.org) provided monthly charts. As the death toll crept upward, U.S. news media recorded the grim benchmarks: 1,000 soldiers dead by September 2004; 2,000 in October 2005.

These benchmarks would have come sooner if they had used statistics based on all soldier deaths, but the deaths of non-Americans were considered less newsworthy. On October 25, the date that marked 2,000 U.S. deaths, few reporters bothered to mention, even in passing, that 199 soldiers from other countries had also been killed (half of them British)—not to mention 3,500 deaths of U.S.-trained Iraqi police and military. The *Washington Post* reported on the 2,000 milestone with poignant reporting on Americans who were coping with the loss of loved ones, but made no mention at all of the deaths of foreign soldiers. Its only mention of Iraqi deaths came in a single paragraph near the bottom of the story. “Based on fragmented reports,” it stated, “the number of enemy Iraqi fighters killed appears to be several times greater than the U.S. fatalities, while independent estimates of the number of dead Iraqi civilians range from 20,000 to 30,000.” These numbers, however, almost certainly understated Iraqi losses.

During “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” the U.S. military has avoided giving Iraqi body counts. No specific numbers have been offered in briefings or public reports, although officials have used vague adjectives to characterize the numbers. “The loss of innocent life is a tragedy for anyone involved in it, but the numbers are really very low,” said Paul Bremer, the head of the Provisional Coalition Authority in August 2003.

Just a few days earlier, however, Col. Guy Shields, another U.S. military spokesman, had said that the U.S. didn’t *have* any numbers. It was not trying to count civilian deaths, he said, because doing so was just too difficult: “Well, we do not keep records for the simple reason that there is no really accurate way,” Shields said at a press briefing on August 4. “In terms of statistics we have no definite estimates of civilian casualties for the whole campaign. It would be irresponsible to give firm estimates given the wide range of variables. For example we’ve had cases where during a conflict, we believed civilians had been wounded and perhaps killed, but by the time our forces have a chance to fully assess the outcomes of a contact, the wounded or the dead civilians have been removed from the scene. Factors such as this make it impossible for us to maintain an accurate account.”

It ought to be obvious upon even a moment’s reflection that this argument is nonsense. Even if it is impossible to obtain a perfect casualty count, it is still possible to make meaningful estimates. Casualty statistics exist for

the Christian Crusades, the Hundred Years War in Europe, the English Civil War, the First and Second World Wars, the Russian Civil War of 1917-22, the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War, Vietnam, and the Russian war in Afghanistan—to name just a few. Compared to the war in Iraq, those wars all occurred under conditions that were less conducive to recordkeeping, and with weaker technological capabilities for battlefield monitoring. If statistics do not exist for Iraq, it is not for lack of ability to compile them; it is because of unwillingness to do so.

In the post-9/11 political environment in the United States, it was not just the government that chose this course. For journalists and many members of the general public as well, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were acts of retaliation, and they simply did not want to be bothered by hearing how many innocent people might suffer as a result. During the war in Afghanistan, the *News Herald* in Panama City, Florida sent a memo to its editorial staff. “DO NOT USE photos on Page 1A showing civilian casualties from the U.S. war on Afghanistan,” it warned. “Our sister paper in Fort Walton Beach has done so and received hundreds and hundreds of threatening e-mails and the like. . . . DO NOT USE wire stories which lead with civilian casualties from the U.S. war on Afghanistan. They should be mentioned further down in the story. If the story needs rewriting to play down the civilian casualties, DO IT. The only exception is if the U.S. hits an orphanage, school or similar facility and kills scores or hundreds of children. . . . Failure to follow any of these or other standing rules could put your job in jeopardy.”

In Afghanistan and Iraq alike, the closest thing to systematic efforts at counting the dead came, not from journalists or the government, but from motivated private individuals. During the war in Afghanistan, University of New Hampshire economics professor Marc Herold, a critic of the war, attempted to compile a count of Afghani deaths by tallying the numbers in verified reports from aid agencies, eyewitnesses and the world’s media. Herold’s methodology ignored soldiers and only looked at civilian deaths, and since some deaths in wartime never get publicly reported, undoubtedly he missed some of the casualties that were actually occurring. He made no attempt to tally indirect deaths caused by land mines, lack of water, food or medicine. His initial report also included some errors, reflecting inaccuracies and inconsistencies in some of the underlying news reports, as well as double-counting due to confused site names in some of the reports that Herold cited. After adjusting as best he could for those factors, by the end

of July 2002 Herold had arrived at a stable estimate of between 3,000 and 3,400 Afghan civilians killed since the start of war on October 7.

This effort to tally the dead came under instant attack from supporters of the war such as popular conservative blogger Glenn Reynolds, who called Herold a “pseudomathicator.” Other conservative bloggers called him an “anti-war propagandist,” a “charlatan,” “pseudoscholar,” “the professor who can’t count straight,” “full of shit,” an “eternal liar.”

IRAQ BODY COUNT

With the commencement of war in Iraq, Herold served as advisor to a British-based team of researchers and antiwar activists who established the Iraq Body Count project (IraqBodyCount.net), an internet-based dossier of Iraqi civilian casualties that was compiled using a methodology similar to Herold’s, with additional care taken to cross-check and review results. They also required two independent agencies to publish a report before adding it to their count. Where different news stories reported a different civilian death toll from a single incident, they added the low number to their “minimum” estimate and the high number to their “maximum” estimate. Even so, their requirement that deaths had to be first reported in the news as a condition for being counted virtually guaranteed that even their “maximum” estimate was an undercount. “We are not a news organization ourselves and like everyone else can only base our information on what has been reported so far,” they stated. “What we are attempting to provide is a credible compilation of civilian deaths that have been reported by recognized sources. ... It is likely that many if not most civilian casualties will go unreported by the media. That is the sad nature of war.”

In July 2005, Iraq Body Count issued a news release on the number of civilian casualties in the first two years of war. It had tallied 24,865 civilian deaths during that period. Its conclusions were reported prominently in leading newspapers throughout Latin America and Europe. “Virtually all British dailies carried the story in full on July 20,” noted *Miami Herald* columnist Andres Oppenheimer. “But in the U.S. press, the Iraq Body Count report got short shrift. From a search in the Nexis-Lexis database, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* were among the few to carry staff-written stories on the report. *The Washington Post* mentioned it in passing, in the last paragraph of a story on the Iraq war, accompanied by a chart on civilian casualties. Most other U.S. newspapers, including the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and

The Herald didn’t carry the story in their print editions.” The conservative *National Review*, however, responded to the report by denouncing Iraq Body Count as a “hard-left antiwar group.”

Another, less systematic effort at counting the dead was mounted by Marla Ruzicka, a peace activist from California who, like Herold, got her start counting casualties in Afghanistan. Unlike Herold, Ruzicka didn’t rely on news reports. She did her research in person, going door to door with the assistance of interpreters. By herself, of course, she wasn’t able to cover an entire country. Rather than compiling a complete count, her goal was to obtain financial compensation and assistance for some of the surviving family members of people who had been killed.

A young, attractive blonde, Ruzicka managed to charm U.S. soldiers and diplomats as well as the Iraqi families she was trying to help. In 2005, however, she herself became a casualty of the war when she was killed by a suicide bomber while traveling with a U.S. military convoy. Her death brought effusions of grief and praise for her work from people who knew her. Once again, however, pro-war pundits responded with vitriol. Front-Page Magazine, a popular conservative website, responded to her death with an orgy of vindictive slanders, calling her death “poetic justice” and describing her as an “activist bimchette” whose “sole purpose is to legitimize our enemies, cause problems for U.S. troops already in harm’s way, and morally equate dead terrorists with victims of 9/11.”

The methods used by the Iraq Body Count and Marla Ruzicka were not intended to provide a comprehensive estimate of the total number of Iraqi deaths. To date, the best available estimate remains a study that was conducted in 2004 for a team of medical researchers from Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University and Baghdad’s Al-Mustansiriya University and published in the *Lancet*, England’s leading medical journal. The *Lancet* researchers, led by John Hopkins epidemiologist Les F. Roberts, were familiar with the techniques used to study disease and mortality. Roberts had studied mortality caused by war since 1992, leading surveys in locations including Bosnia, Congo, and Rwanda. His Congo research had been treated as front-page news by the *New York Times* and had been quoted in public testimony by public figures including Colin Powell and Tony Blair.

Roberts’ team in Iraq used a method similar to those he had used elsewhere. It did not attempt to distinguish between civilian and military deaths, and it looked at all causes of death—not just military violence but also crime, chaos, lack of sanitation and medical care. Rather

than simply count deaths, its goal was to estimate the number of excess deaths and the causes of death.

If supporters of the war were genuinely concerned about the welfare of Iraqis, this is precisely the type of information that ought to interest them. And it was possible, in theory at least, that a complete mortality study would actually show that the invasion was saving or would save lives, by eliminating the malnutrition, poverty and government violence that existed under Saddam Hussein.

During the runup to war, some of its supporters had actually claimed that this would happen. "The only reason to fight this war is that doing so will save lives," said Marvin Olasky, a conservative thinker and occasional advisor of President Bush. (It was Olasky who coined the term, "compassionate conservatism.") Olasky recognized that war would inevitably kill some civilians: "Even though our intent is only to take out Saddam Hussein and his soldiers, it is certain that some innocent people will suffer alongside the guilty." Nevertheless, "my sense is that President Bush's policy is the one most likely to minimize the loss of innocent life."

If this were indeed the case, the Lancet study could have provided evidence of it. And a complete mortality study has other, more immediately practical benefits. Knowing the most common causes of death can help in directing assistance and compensation efforts for families of the victims, and it can also help planners design military and reconstruction strategy with an eye to reducing future deaths. Counting the dead is not just an exercise in morbid curiosity. It is important for humanitarian reasons.

The Lancet study's results were chilling. Before the invasion, the major causes of death for Iraqis were heart attacks, strokes, and other chronic disorders. Afterwards, the Lancet reported, "violence was the primary cause of death. Violent deaths were widespread, reported in 15 of 33 clusters, and were mainly attributed to coalition forces. Most individuals reportedly killed by coalition forces were women and children. The risk of death from violence in the period after the invasion was 58 times higher . . . than in the period before the war. . . . Making conservative assumptions, we think that about 100,000 excess deaths, or more have happened since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Violence accounted for most of the excess deaths and air strikes from coalition forces accounted for most violent deaths."

The Lancet study was widely praised by public health researchers and received front-page play in newspapers throughout Europe but was virtually ignored in the U.S. news media. It was not mentioned at all on the Fox, ABC

and CBS networks. NBC mentioned it in a report that lasted 21 seconds. On National Public Radio, "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered" devoted 45 seconds to it. *The Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* gave it about 400 words of mention apiece in stories buried on their inside pages. *The New York Times* gave it 770 words, also on an inside page. It stated that the study "is certain to generate intense controversy," but the *Times* has published nothing further on it since. The *Washington Post* also buried the story on an inside page and quoted Marc E. Garlasco, a senior military analyst at Human Rights Watch, as saying, "These numbers seem to be inflated."

In fact, Garlasco had not read the Lancet paper at the time he was interviewed by the *Post*, and he now regrets his remark. When the reporter phoned, he says, his initial response was, "I haven't read it. I haven't seen it. I don't know anything about it, so I shouldn't comment on it. . . . Like any good journalist, he got me to." Garlasco has subsequently studied the Lancet report and is impressed by it.

In the pro-war media and the right-wing blogosphere, the Lancet study was treated with hostility that matched or exceeded the contempt heaped upon Iraq Body Count and Marla Ruzicka. Ironically, some conservatives began treating Iraq Body Count with newfound respect as a source of lower numbers that they could quote against the Lancet. Marc Gerlasco's dismissive comment from the *Washington Post* was frequently quoted, even though Gerlasco himself disavowed his comment within days of saying it.

"The Lancet has become Al-Jazeera on the Thames," declared Michael Fumento on the Tech Central Station website. Others called the study "shoddy research," "worthless," "rotten to the core," "obviously bogus on its face . . . a piece of polemical garbage."

The Lancet study did not deserve these epithets, but as its authors themselves have stated, its precision was limited. The proper scientific answer to those limitations would be to duplicate the Lancet study independently on a larger scale. Not one of the pro-war commentators whose views we have examined (and we have examined many) has ever called for such research. We have not seen a single comment from a supporter of the war suggesting that a better study should be done. For all their fiery attacks on the supposed flaws of the people who are counting the dead, supporters of the war are unable to offer rebuttals in the form of contrary research findings because they haven't attempted to study the question at all. In effect, they have rejected the very idea that the dead in Iraq should be counted at all. ■

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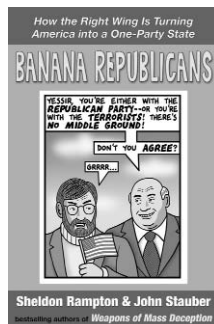
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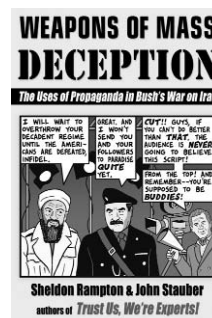


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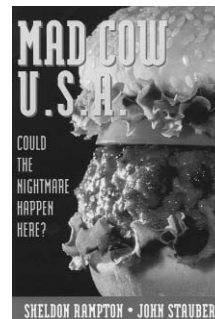
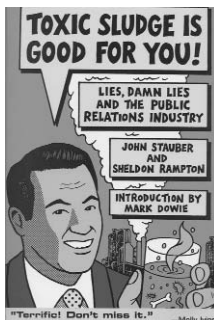


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