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Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

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OUR LITTLE SECRETS

WELCOME TO OPERATION MANIFEST FAILURE

BY PATRICK COCKBURN

BAGHDAD: A year ago, I drove into Baghdad from Iraqi Kurdistan past smouldering Iraqi tanks. The war had just ended. The statue of Saddam toppled. Government buildings burnt but there was still a feeling among those in the city that the worst was over. It is difficult to recapture that feeling today.

Now Iraq is a country where people fear to venture on to the streets. Whether you are a foreign contractor, a Muslim attending prayers or a journalist, this is a land of ever-present danger.

Yesterday, three Japanese journalists, eight South Korean church ministers and two Arab-Israelis were unfortunate enough to discover that harsh reality. We all wonder who it will be tomorrow.

Hours after they were kidnapped, shocking images of the bound Japanese captives with knives held to their throats were released by a previously unknown group called the Mujahedin Brigades. The Korean missionaries are now free but the two Arab-Israelis remain missing and concern is mounting for the safety of a British civilian who disappeared in the southern town of Nasiriyah on Tuesday.

The atmosphere in Baghdad has changed for the worse. At the entrance to the hotel where I am staying, there is a noticeboard near the reception desk. Last year, the pieces

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“Inadvertently, the Bush Administration has begun to destroy an alliance system that for the world’s peace should have been abolished long ago. The Democrats are far less likely to continue that process.”

Alliances and the Election

BY GABRIEL KOLKO

Alliances have been a major cause of wars throughout modern history, removing inhibitions that might otherwise have caused Germany, France and countless nations to reflect much more cautiously before embarking on death and destruction. The dissolution of all alliances is a crucial precondition of a world without wars.

The United States’ strength, to an important extent, has rested on its ability to convince other nations that it was in their vital interest to see America prevail in its global role. With the loss of that ability there will be a fundamental change in the international system, a change whose implications and consequences may ultimately be as far-reaching as the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. The scope of America’s world role is now far more dangerous and ambitious than when Communism existed, but it was fear of the USSR that alone gave NATO its *raison d’être* and provided Washington with the justification for its global pretensions.

Enemies have disappeared and new ones – many once former allies and congenial states – have taken their places. The United States, to a degree to which it is itself uncertain, needs alliances. But even friendly nations are less likely than ever to be bound into complaisant “coalitions of the willing”.

Nothing in President Bush’s extraordinarily vague doctrine, promulgated on September 19, 2002, of fighting “preemptive” wars, unilaterally if neces-

sary, was a fundamentally new departure. Since the 1890s, regardless of whether the Republicans or Democrats were in office, the U.S. has intervened in countless ways – sending in the Marines, installing and bolstering friendly tyrants – in the Western Hemisphere to determine the political destinies of innumerable southern nations. The Democratic Administration that established the United Nations explicitly regarded the hemisphere as the U.S.’ sphere-of-influence, and at the same time created the IMF and World Bank to police the world economy.

Indeed, it was the Democratic Party that created most of the pillars of postwar American foreign policy, from the Truman Doctrine in 1947 and NATO through the institutionalization of the arms race and the core illusion that weapons and firepower are a solution to many of the world’s political problems. So the Democrats share, in the name of a truly “bipartisan” consensus, equal responsibility for both the character and dilemmas of America’s foreign strategy today. President Jimmy Carter initiated the Afghanistan adventure in July 1979, hoping to bog down the Soviets there as the Americans had been in Vietnam. And it was Carter who first encouraged Saddam Hussein to confront Iranian fundamentalism, a policy President Reagan continued.

In his 2003 book *The Roaring Nineties* Joseph E. Stiglitz, chairman of the President’s Council of Economic Advisers, (KOLKO continued on page 3)

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of paper stuck on the board were mostly from Iraqis wanting jobs as translators for foreign companies and itemising their qualifications.

Today, there are no such notices. Too many translators have been killed or threatened for any Iraqi to advertise the fact that he or she wants to work for a foreigner.

Instead, there are three notices on the board from different companies all advertising armoured vehicles for sale. One of them says it can also offer body armour, adding seductively that this is in "limited quantity in the country". Few in Iraq will be celebrating the anniversary of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein today, though he was loathed by most Iraqis. They have little to celebrate.

And if anybody in my hotel has any doubts about their attitude to the anniversary, a gentle warning arrived this morning by fax. It is signed by "the Iraqi armed resistance" and was also sent to schools, businesses and government offices. It reads: "We warn you from putting up decorations, Iraqi flags or any celebration on 9/4/2004. Anybody who disobeys this order will be punished, especially those in charge."

I never thought that the American invasion of Iraq would end very happily,

Editors
ALEXANDER COCKBURN
JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Business
BECKY GRANT

Design
DEBORAH THOMAS

Counselor
BEN SONNENBERG

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PO Box 228

Petrolia, CA 95558

1-800-840-3683 (phone)

counterpunch@counterpunch.org

www.counterpunch.org

but it still seems extraordinary that a year after Americans entered the capital there are only 12 hours of electricity a day.

Outside the hotel where The Independent has its office I have to make a little jump every morning over a drain filled with raw sewage spouting out of a broken pipe nearby.

Nobody seems to be very interested in fixing it.

One quick way of gauging how things are going in Baghdad is to look at the four chimneys of the Daura power station which dominate the skyline in the south of the capital. If smoke is coming out of two or three it means that the electricity supply will be reasonable, but if only one chimney is producing smoke then there will not be enough power. Returning to Baghdad earlier this week, I noticed that for the first time since it was bombed in 1991, no smoke is coming out of any of the chimneys.

It did not have to happen this way. Saddam Hussein should not have been a hard act to follow. After 30 years of disastrous wars, Iraqis wanted a quiet life.

All the Americans really needed to do was to get the relatively efficient Iraqi administration up and running again. Instead, they let the government dissolve, and have never successfully resurrected it. It has been one of the most extraordinary failures in history.

The symbol of the new Iraq is the concrete block: enormous blocks 15ft high, like gigantic tombstones, are used as blast barriers around all the US-run Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) buildings. They have surrounded the hotels since the suicide bombings started last August.

Driving near Saddam's old Republican Palace, there are lines of these blocks several miles long on both sides of the road, turning it into a sort of dismal concrete canyon.

There are many more cars on the streets, perhaps 150,000 in Baghdad alone, because of the flood of imports after the war as the collapse of Iraqi customs meant that nobody had to pay import duty. For the same reason the pavements were heaped with new fridges, televisions, deep freezers, generators and television satellite equipment.

These days, almost everybody who had the money to buy these items has

done so. Businessmen hoped that there would then be a boom in mobile phones. That has not really taken place. The reason is that the system chosen by the US administrators works only intermittently and is too expensive for most Iraqis. The US Army has insisted that its range should not be extended to towns around the capital in case the phones might be used by insurgents.

Only part of the ordinary phone system has been rebuilt. More importantly, for Iraqis who want to get on with their lives, personal security is now worse than in Saddam's time. Now criminals are better organised. And better armed. Safety is a daily concern for incomers and local residents alike.

There was a moment at the end of last summer when life in Baghdad seemed to be getting better, even if it had an awfully long way to go. Businessmen would express long-term optimism, saying: "The Americans cannot afford to fail." It is not a sentiment you hear any longer.

Once again, Iraqis are getting off the streets early. Even as I am writing this, I can hear the sound of mysterious explosions in the distance, which give an added sense of nervousness in a city already on edge. Earlier, three loud explosions had gone off in the so-called Green Zone where the CPA has its headquarters and smoke was seen rising. Panic is just below the surface. In the Amiriyah quarter this morning, all the shops suddenly closed because of a wave of fear that something bad was going to happen, though nobody could say what it would be.

We went to a mosque in the Adhamiyah quarter, a Sunni district where there had been a gun battle overnight. There was a large and angry crowd outside the Abu Hanifa mosque. The Iraqis with me said it might not be a good place to be a foreigner, so we went away without talking to them.

A prominent Iraqi businessman who returned from exile after the war told me this week that he never went out alone any more because of the danger of kidnapping. As an added security measure, he is not working in a large building owned by his company, but has rented an office in another part of the city where his face is not known.

And the foreigners do not have a mo-