

CounterPunch

October 1-15, 2004

Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

VOL. 11, NO. 17

TERROR AND DEATH: IRAQ FALLS APART

BY PATRICK COCKBURN

Baghdad.

Signs of disintegration are everywhere in Iraq. Oily columns of black smoke billow up from the airport road where US patrols are regularly hit by suicide bombers or roadside bombs between Baghdad and Camp Victory, the gigantic US military headquarters inside the airport.

In a vain attempt to deny cover to resistance fighters, American soldiers have chopped down the palm trees and bushes beside the highway leaving only the stumps behind.

The bombs, usually several heavy artillery shells detonated by a command wire, are very powerful. A family showed me the shattered stock of an American machine-gun, its barrel twisted sideways, hurled onto the roof of their house by the bomb which destroyed an American Humvee in the road outside.

It was bizarre to go early one morning to look at the nondescript and wholly undefended villa from which Kenneth Bigley, Eugene Armstrong and Jack Hensley were kidnapped by ten masked men.

Could they have taken seriously the line pumped out by the White House and Downing Street that the dangers of Iraq were being exaggerated by the media?

They behaved as if they had. Some reports of their abduction said they lived in the affluent al-Mansur district, the embassy quarter of Baghdad. Their house is certainly in al-Mansur, but not in a wealthy part of it.

The two four-wheel drive cars parked in the road advertised the presence of for-
(IRAQ *continued on page 4*)

How Bush Might Have Been Defeated

BY ROBIN BLACKBURN

At first blush the outcome of the US election looks like a ringing endorsement for George W. Bush and the aggressions he had unleashed. And in turn this seems to prove that a majority of US working class and middle class electors are lost in a cultural fog which prevents them from even seeing, let alone pursuing, their own economic interests. But such conclusions are too easily reached. A different campaign by a different contender could have yielded a Democratic victory.

The cultural factors merit serious analysis and receive it in Tom Frank's book *What Went Wrong in Kansas*. He tells us that the Republican strategists use guns and gay marriage to connect with disgruntled working class voters but that mainstream Democrats are too beholden to corporate interests to make an effective counter-attack - to trump cultural populism by economic populism. In fact the cutting of welfare and loss of jobs make family and religious support networks of increasing importance.

More generally why should we conclude with the New York Review crowd that 'Enlightenment values' fail the electoral test when so little was said in their defense? Across a wide range of issues the campaign waged by the Democratic contender willfully avoided posing any clear alternatives.

The US voters were offered two pro-occupation candidates. It's not just that Kerry voted for war in 2002, though that didn't help. It's that he did not bring himself to even hint at Abu Greib or the presidential position papers legitimating torture. Raising this issue would not have been easy but not to raise them at all was to condone the most disgraceful aspect of the President's war

policy. Barring a few sick individuals, the photographs of Abu Graib, and the legal papers sanctioning torture, were deeply uncomfortable matters for most conservatives. One of the tests facing the challenger was to find the best way to do this. Though the question was incomparably less serious Bush faced a similar problem over Lewinsky in 2000. To have dwelt too grossly on the matter would have been counter-productive, precisely because many Americans saw the episode as besmirching a sacred institution. But to have avoided the issue altogether would have been to allow the Democrats to win. So Bush and his handlers contrived some oft-repeated phrases about restoring dignity to the White House which did the job nicely.

When Kerry distanced himself from Bush's war and occupation his poll numbers climbed - after the 'wrong war' speech and, even more strikingly, after the first presidential debate where Kerry attacked Bush's plans for disposing of Iraqi oil and for setting up 14 military bases. But this is as far as it got and no more criticism of the objective in Iraq was to be heard.

The war on terror was supposedly a strong point for Bush and he repeated ad nauseam that the best way to fight terrorism was to promote democracy in the Middle East and elsewhere. Kerry stood within yards of Bush listening to this argument without responding in any way to it. The really persistent could look up a speech by Kerry on April 23 and find out that he did not think the objective in Iraq was democracy - stability was the best that could be hoped for, he said then. But no amount of research can unearth any attempt by the Democratic
(BLACKBURN *continued on page 3*)

From Detroit to Baghdad Death of an Interrogator

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

When Ed Seitz was killed in the shower by a bomb lobbed into Camp Victory, near Baghdad airport not long before the election, I thought the name was familiar. Seitz, described in news stories as a 41-year-old State Department special agent in the Diplomatic Security Service, had been in Iraq for less than three months. He was billed as the first U.S. diplomat to have been killed in Iraq. The story I remembered put him in Detroit back in late February 2002, which is when John Clarke, an organizer with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) sent to our counterpunch.org Website a vivid account of an encounter with Seitz in the early afternoon of Feb. 19, 2002.

Clarke had crossed the international bridge between Sarnia, Ontario, and Port Huron, Mich., on his way to a speaking engagement that had been set up by students at Michigan State University. He never made the gig. Instead, after border agents had checked him out on the computer, and searched him and his car, he was held in "a controlled reception area".

"After about an hour and a half", Clarke wrote, "a man entered ... and passed by me into the inner offices. He was carrying a big folder and a pile of files. It struck me that he carried them the way a highly skilled worker might carry his or her precision tools. He spent some time in discussion with the local officers, and then I was brought into an interrogation room to deal with him. He introduced himself and gave me his card. His name was Edward J. Seitz of the State Department of the United States Diplomatic Security Service, and his rank was Special Agent. I found him to be an impressive and fascinating character. It was immediately obvious to me that I was dealing with a specialist in interrogation methods. He told the admiring locals at one point that he had been stationed in Yemen, and I avoided speculating on how he had employed his talents there."

In a scenario worthy of Joe Orton, the admiring Clarke described how Seitz expertly shifted from role to role. First, the pose of Inspector Bumble, "extremely affable in his manner and striking a pose of mild confusion that was designed to make me underestimate him." The "basic strategy ... apart from general intelligence gathering, was to try and set me up to tell him something false that would place me in the situation of violating U.S. law."

Clarke gave forthright answers, and Seitz's demeanor abruptly changed. Inspector Bumble disappeared. Seitz gradually shifted his chair closer and closer to Clarke, barking out well-informed interrogatories. "Was I personally an anarchist or a socialist? (In the interests of anti-capitalist unity, I won't say which one of these I acknowledged I was.) Seitz had a huge file on OCAP with him that included leaflets from public speaking events I had been at in the United States. He knew the name of the man I stayed with the last time I was in Chicago."

Suddenly, the mask of affability went back on. Seitz told Clarke he was a 'gentleman' and he didn't want to lock him up. He told Clarke he would have to ban him from the U.S. but he could go to the U.S. Consulate in Toronto and apply for a waiver. He could just take a seat in the waiting room

while they prepared some paper work but Clarke would soon be on his way.

"I had not been sitting out there long, however, before the special agent came out to try a new tack that I had heard of in the past. Essentially, his plan was to make me think he was utterly mad and, thereby, rattle me to the point where I lost my judgment. I assume the method works better if it is used after serious sleep deprivation. Then came the most astounding part of the whole interrogation.

"Out of the blue, Seitz demanded to know where Osama Bin Laden was hiding. I knew where he was, he insisted. If I grew a beard, I would look like Bin Laden. I was holding back on telling him why I was going to the university and who I was going to meet there.

"If I didn't want to go to jail, it was time to tell him the real story. I replied that I had been quite open with him about my intentions and that sending me to jail was now up to him. He laughed and told me there were no problems. I could go home after all. Did I drink tea or coffee? Would I have a coffee with him if he came up to Toronto? I told him I would, which was the only lie I told that day, and he gathered up his files and left."

Work got busier for Seitz. Soon he was involved in what ultimately became a humiliation for the Department of Justice prosecutors and for security agents like Seitz. This was the Koubriti case (otherwise known as the "Detroit Sleeper Cell case"), the first case to proceed to trial on terrorism-related charges following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The case arose from a Sept. 17, 2001, search of an apartment in the greater Detroit area. Detroit Joint Terrorism Task Force ("JTTF") agents went to the apartment in an attempt to locate and question Nabil Al-Marabh, an individual on the FBI's "watch list" of suspected terrorists.

Although Al-Marabh's name was listed on the mailbox, he was not actually living at the apartment at the time of the search. Instead agents found defendants Karim Koubriti, Ahmed Hannan and Farouk Ali-Haimoud, who were living as apparent transients with little or no furniture.

Life very rapidly became a nightmare for these three, charged with being a sleeper cell of Al Qaeda, spying out the terrain for another terror attack. They were tried and convicted. Then, on August 31 of this year, (**Interrogator** continued on page 6)

Editors
ALEXANDER COCKBURN
JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Business
BECKY GRANT

Design
DEBORAH THOMAS

Counselor
BEN SONNENBERG

Published twice monthly except
August, 22 issues a year:
\$40 individuals,
\$100 institutions/supporters
\$30 student/low-income
CounterPunch.

All rights reserved.

CounterPunch

PO Box 228

Petrolia, CA 95558

1-800-840-3683 (phone)

counterpunch@counterpunch.org

www.counterpunch.org