

**F O R E I G N P O L I C Y**

# The plot thins

**B**

ill Clinton's recent decision to launch a cruise missile attack on Baghdad was based on the claims of Wali Abdelhadi Ghazali, a male nurse from the Iraqi city of Najaf. Ghazali says that Iraqi intelligence officers instructed him to travel to Kuwait to kill George Bush during the former president's visit this past April.

But most of those who are alleged to have taken part appear to be whiskey smugglers by trade, not assassins, and all but Ghazali deny knowing anything of the plot. Furthermore, there are a number of inconsistencies in Ghazali's story.

Two hours after the June 27 attack, President Clinton went on television to blame Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his security forces for plotting to kill Bush. "This attempt at revenge by a tyrant against the world coalition that defeated him in war is par-

ticularly loathsome. We could not and cannot let such action go unanswered."

To justify the raid, Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, produced evidence that focused on an Iraqi intelligence attempt to explode a car bomb on the streets of Kuwait. The administration says the bomb was aimed at George Bush.

At the Kuwait trial of the 14 men accused of the plot, testimony points to a scheme devised in the week before Bush arrived in Kuwait for the Gulf victory celebrations in April. One of the accused is Raad Abdel Amir al-Assadi, 33, a self-possessed man who owns the Marbed coffee shop in the southern Iraqi city of Basra, 70 miles from Kuwait. Assadi says the Marbed is "a café for smugglers"—a flourishing occupation in Basra where Iraqi bootleggers can buy alcohol legally and sell it profitably in Kuwait, which is "dry."

Any Iraqi involved in smuggling would probably need to know somebody in the police or intelligence service, and Assadi says

he knew some Iraqi intelligence officers.

One of these, Mohammed Jawad, asked him to guide somebody into Kuwait City on April 9 in return for 13 cases of whiskey and 15,000 Iraqi dinars, worth about \$195. Jawad also gave him 10 sticks of dynamite and told him that he was to blow up Kuwait car shops and showrooms. Assadi says he agreed to go because he needed the money and was frightened of Iraqi intelligence, but he never took his mission as a saboteur too seriously. He was more interested in selling the whiskey, and he buried the dynamite in the desert before he reached Kuwait.

He also says that neither Jawad nor anybody else told him about a plan to assassinate Bush. He says he did not even know the former president was in Kuwait, and the first he knew about the plot to blow him up was when he was told about it by his Kuwaiti police interrogator.

But Ghazali, 36, says he was told to kill Bush. A male nurse, he works in a hospital in Najaf, a holy city of the Shia Muslims close to the Euphrates between Baghdad and Basra. On April 8, only a day before they were due to cross the border, Ghazali was approached in Basra by an Iraqi intelligence officer called Abu Rafed.

Rafed asked him if he knew why sanctions had been imposed on Iraq and Iraqi children went hungry. "The international resolutions?" ventured Ghazali. "No, it's Bush," said Rafed. "He is the reason for the destruction. We are sending you to Kuwait." Ghazali did not like the idea. He told Rafed that he had five children and his wife was in the hospital.

Ghazali was to take a Toyota Land Cruiser containing a 180-pound bomb and park it in Kuwait University, where Bush, his family and former Secretary of State

*Did Iraq really conspire to kill George Bush? The evidence is a lot flimsier than the White House would have you believe.*

By Patrick Cockburn

James Baker were being honored by the Kuwaitis. There was a remote-control detonation device and, if that failed, a timing device.

Rafed said that when Bush's car "comes close to it from a distance of 200 or 300 yards, you push the button and the car will explode and Bush's car also." The Iraqi intelligence man also gave him an exploding belt which, if the car bomb failed, could be used by Ghazali to blow himself up, and Bush as well.

It is this evidence that is the basis for the U.S. claim. But there are a number of peculiarities about the story. The bomb plot was explained to the man who was to carry it out only the week before he was to go to Kuwait on a mission that required a suicidal willingness to die. Moreover, Iraqi intelligence seemed primarily intent on causing mayhem in Kuwait City, and the attempt on Bush, by Ghazali's account, sounds like a bonus.

Even if Ghazali had obeyed all his instructions, he would not have succeeded in killing the former president. Bush and his family were in an armor-plated car, so that the Toyota Land Cruiser would have had to be parked very close to kill him; not 200 to 300 yards away. Iraqi intelligence had also gotten his itinerary wrong. Bush did not visit Kuwait University where Ghazali was meant to park the car but went to another university in Kuwait.

From its conception, the plan fell apart. Kuwaiti intelligence claims it had prior knowledge of an attack dating from March but has yet to produce evidence of this. Ghazali and Assadi, accompanied by other Iraqis, most of whom appear to be smugglers, crossed the border into Kuwait and were arrested on April 13. Their morale was low. Iraqi intelligence gave Ghazali a 9mm pistol with two grenades, but he says he was so frightened "that I began praying as soon as I reached Kuwait."

They hid the Toyota in a sheep pen to go on reconnaissance and stayed with two Kuwaitis also involved in smuggling alcohol. When they returned to the Toyota, they found it surrounded by policemen. Ghazali escaped, throwing away his exploding belt, and he and three others stole a car to try to return to Kuwait. When it broke down, they started to walk across the desert but were seen and arrested.

The Kuwaitis said they had discovered a conspiracy to



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kill Bush almost immediately. Ever since the government returned to the emirate after the Gulf War, it has frequently alleged Iraqi interference in its affairs. But such allegations are

not always reliable. Kuwaiti officials once claimed, for example, that an Iraqi naval force had invaded the Kuwaiti island of Bubiyan and was repelled by Kuwaiti forces. Investigation revealed that the invasion force consisted of Iraqi fishermen looking for scrap.

Only in early May did the FBI and CIA begin to think that Baghdad might have made a serious effort to kill

**Bomb first, ask questions later. Iraqi bomb shelter destroyed by U.S. forces, March 1991.**

Bush. Hussein is notoriously vindictive. He had killed Iraqi, Kurdish and Palestinian opponents in foreign capitals. In Kurdistan, from which the Iraqi army has withdrawn, Iraqi intelligence has exploded a series of bombs in the past 18 months.

In Washington, there were some doubters, particularly in the Pentagon. They said that the way the Kuwaitis had interviewed the prisoners made their testimony useless.

The implication is that the 14 men under arrest were tortured, though the FBI, which later interviewed them, denies this. Human rights organizations say there has been a decrease in torture over the past year, but they have no direct access to the men on trial.

The trial itself opened before the heavily guarded state security court on June 5, the first time the accused had been seen by anybody except the police since their arrests. The prosecution accused 12 men of plotting to kill Bush. Two Kuwaitis are accused of harboring the plotters and smuggling drugs and alcohol.

Their chances of a fair trial do not look good. Middle East Watch says that 16 people sentenced to death in Kuwait by the state security court in June mostly "complained of severe beatings inflicted on them to elicit confessions for alleged crimes of collaboration."

Was there an assassination attempt? And was it ordered by Saddam Hussein? Washington emphasizes that the circuitry, electronics, timer and explosives in the Toyota Land Cruiser closely resemble Iraqi car bombs found elsewhere. This helps to prove that Iraqi intelligence planted a bomb in Kuwait but not that they planned to assassinate Bush.

Incompetence does not

rule out an assassination attempt, but the recruitment of a gang of whiskey smugglers to plant a bomb at the wrong university does make it more difficult to take seriously. ◀

Patrick Cockburn writes for Britain's *Independent on Sunday*, from which this article was excerpted with permission.

## Verdict first, evidence later

**A**n odd reasoning underlies U.S. media coverage of administration claims that Iraq was behind the alleged plot on George Bush's life. It's a logic similar to that of one Kuwaiti businessman, who told the *Wall Street Journal*: "The verdict on whether the Iraqis tried to kill Bush has been passed by virtue of the American strike. Obviously the Americans believe these guys did try to kill Bush. We never doubted it."

Nor, apparently, did mainstream news organizations. As media critic and syndicated columnist Norman Solomon puts it: "U.S. journalists tend to take such assertions on faith. It's somewhat like *Alice in Wonderland*: first the verdict, then the evidence later—maybe."

In an informal survey of the country's leading news outlets, *In These Times* could find no attempts to independently confirm the administration's charges of Iraqi involvement in the bomb plot. And those few news organizations that did look into the administration's claims went to an odd source: the administration itself.

Examining the government's "exhaustive investigation" of "Iraq's masterminding role," R. Jeffrey Smith assured *Washington Post* readers that "[d]isclosure of [the] Iraqi intelligence link goes beyond the largely circumstantial evidence presented publicly by the Clinton administration to justify the attack on Baghdad. [Administration] officials, who spoke on the condition they not be named, said other evidence of Iraq's involvement was derived from classified sources and methods, including a sensitive study of Iraqi intelligence recruitment methods."

If all this—the unnamed sources, the "classified" information—sounds a little familiar, it should. Back in 1986, President Reagan, in justifying an air attack on Libya, cited "irrefutable evidence" that the government of Moammar Qaddafi was behind a deadly Berlin disco bombing.

That "irrefutable evidence," however, was quickly refuted by Manfred Ganshow, the head of a 100-person team investigating the bombing. Three weeks after the incident, Ganshow told the armed-services publication *Stars and Stripes*: "[I have] no more evidence that Libya was connected to the bombing than I had two days after the act. Which is none."

Nonetheless, a *New York Times* editorial claimed that the proof was "laid out clearly to the public. ... Even the most scrupulous citizens can only approve and applaud the American attacks on Libya."

But as Solomon and Martin A. Lee explain in *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in the U.S. Media*: "Months later, West German authorities concluded that if any country was behind the Berlin disco bombing, it was Syria, not Libya. But that hardly seemed to matter as U.S. news media continued to blame the incident on Qaddafi. Soon another round of stories appeared, warning of new plots by Libya. Replete with 42 references to unnamed U.S. officials, a *Wall Street Journal* article ... disclosed that Qaddafi was planning more terrorism. This time the unnamed source turned out to be National Security Adviser John Poindexter, who was promoting what *Newsweek* later called a 'disinformation program' aimed at destabilizing the Libyan government. The propaganda operation was outlined in a three-page memo, dated August 14, 1986, from Poindexter to President Reagan. ... [When the operation was revealed] reporters and editors cried foul, expressing righteous indignation about being misled by the U.S. government."

Now the pattern seems to be repeating itself. "In this instance the U.S. press bought a package from the same institution that has sold a lot of bills of goods in the past," says Solomon. "I often think of a quote attributed to Napoleon: 'It's not necessary to censor the news; it's sufficient to delay it until it no longer matters.'"

—Miles Harvey



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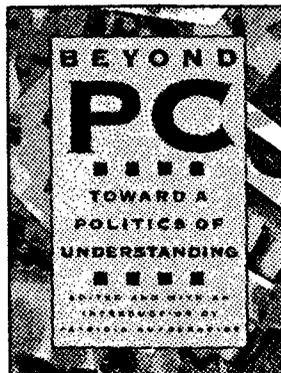
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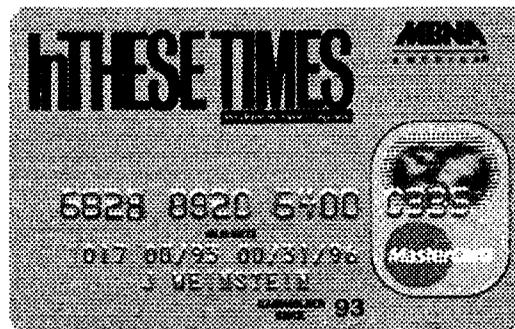
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## DIALOGUE

# Biology isn't destiny

By Beth Maschinot

**M**emorial Day. We've done the rites—guacamole, bean dip and chicken. We huddle around the TV on the patio as our modern warriors, the Bulls, outshoot and outmaneuver the Knicks on TV. In the backyard, the girls and boys wield heavy plastic waterguns, shooting furiously at each other. Later, when the girls go in to watch *Monty Python*, the six boys pair up. Time for hand-to-hand combat, all wrestling, no punches allowed.

The parents, lefties all, watch in rapt attention, making comments on how evenly or unevenly matched each twosome is. One mom talks proudly about how she has a friend who's been giving her son wrestling tips. A father says, with some surprise, that even though his son has been in the room while he's flipped through cable channels showing wrestling, the boy

hasn't shown much interest—"yet." A non-parent, a man who is the most talkative, sociable person there, says to everyone as we watch the matches, "Don't you think that boys just are more aggressive than girls?" Some days, with a more familiar crowd, this would have brought out the attack dog in me. Maybe that was Bruce's intent, to pump some wind in the fast-fading group. But today, the combination of situational shyness and four margaritas keeps me quiet. (Or is it that on those other days my estrogen had ebbed, allowing my testosterone to be prominent, while today I'm just "all woman"?)

In his book, *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, written in 1973, sociologist Stephen Goldberg claims that in every society on anthropological record (all 1,200 of them), males have a greater drive toward dominance in both hier-

archies and in male-female relationships. Because these realities are so universal, Goldberg argues that it is the presence of biological differences that must make it so. He chooses testosterone as that differential factor.

In the May 31 *In These Times*, Helen Fisher argues that the biological evidence that supports Goldberg's theory should be taken seriously. She baldly asserts that there is a "clear link between testosterone and aggression" and that "high rank is associated with high levels of male hormones in males and monkeys."

Such biological arguments are seductive because they seem so, well, hard-wired, essential, unmessy, just plain *real*. The problem is that when testosterone is used as the soundbite answer to differences in aggression and dominance between genders, factors like historical role differentiation, current gender socialization and the realities of sex discrimination get left by the wayside.

Goldberg's title says it all. If dominance can be reduced to aggression, which can be reduced to testosterone, then men as a group will always "have the upper hand." He who has the testosterone rules the world. But Goldberg's work has been faulted from many directions in the intervening 20 years since his book appeared.

Most scientists agree that the fetal brain is "sexed" at birth, with boys receiving more testosterone and girls more estrogen. But unpacking the link between fetal brain hormones and different behavior between the sexes is a much more complex business than Goldberg allows, and has been the subject of well-regarded books by biologists—notably *Myths of Gender* by Ann Fausto-Sterling and *Science and Gender* by Ruth Bleier.

First, as always, is the sticky problem of definition: what do we mean by aggression? Though Goldberg doesn't define his main concept, he says that aggression or dominance "manifests