

The Truth Will Emerge

BY US SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Truth has a way of asserting itself despite all attempts to obscure it. Distortion only serves to derail it for a time. No matter to what lengths we humans may go to obfuscate facts or delude our fellows, truth has a way of squeezing out through the cracks, eventually.

But the danger is that at some point it may no longer matter. The danger is that damage is done before the truth is widely realized. The reality is that, sometimes, it is easier to ignore uncomfortable facts and go along with whatever distortion is currently in vogue. We see a lot of this today in politics.

Regarding the situation in Iraq, it appears that the American people may have been lured into accepting the unprovoked invasion of a sovereign nation, in violation of long-standing international law, under false premises. There is ample evidence that the horrific events of September 11 have been carefully manipulated to switch public focus from Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, who [allegedly] masterminded the September 11th attacks, to Saddam Hussein who did not.

The run up to our invasion of Iraq featured the President and members of his cabinet invoking every frightening image they could conjure, from mushroom clouds, to buried caches of germ warfare, to drones poised to deliver germ laden death in our major cities. We were treated to a heavy dose of overstatement concerning Saddam Hussein's direct threat to our freedoms. The tactic was guaranteed to provoke a sure reaction from a nation still suffering from a combination of post traumatic stress and justifiable anger after the attacks of 9/11. It was the exploitation of fear. It was a placebo for the anger.

Since the war's end, every subsequent revelation which has seemed to refute the previous dire claims of the Bush Administration has been brushed aside. Instead of addressing the contradictory evidence, the White House deftly changes the subject. No weapons of mass destruction have yet turned up, but we are told that they will in time. Perhaps they yet will. But, our costly and destructive bunker busting attack on Iraq seems to have proven, in the main, precisely the opposite of what we were told was the urgent reason to go in.

What has become painfully clear in the aftermath of war is that Iraq was no immediate threat to the US. Ravaged by years of sanctions, Iraq did not even lift an airplane against us. Iraq's threatening death-dealing fleet of unmanned drones, about which we heard so much, morphed into one prototype made of plywood and string. Their missiles proved to be outdated and of limited range. Their army was quickly overwhelmed by our technology and our well trained troops.

Presently our loyal military personnel continue their mission of diligently searching for WMDs. They have so far turned up only fertilizer, vacuum cleaners, conventional weapons and the occasional buried swimming pool. They are misused on such a mission and they continue to be at grave risk. But, the Bush team's extensive hype of WMDs in Iraq as justification for a preemptive invasion has become more than embarrassing. It has raised serious questions about prevarication and the reckless use of power. Were our troops needlessly put at risk? Were countless

Iraqi civilians killed and maimed when war was not really necessary? Was the American public deliberately misled? Was the world?

What makes me cringe even more is the continued claim that we are 'liberators'. The facts don't seem to support the label we have so euphemistically attached to ourselves. True, we have unseated a brutal, despicable despot, but 'liberation' implies the follow up of freedom, self-determination and a better life for the common people. In fact, if the situation in Iraq is the result of 'liberation', we may have set the cause of freedom back 200 years.

Despite our high-blown claims of a better life for the Iraqi people, water is scarce, and often foul, electricity is a sometime thing, food is in short supply, hospitals are stacked with the wounded and maimed, historic treasures of the region and of the Iraqi people have been looted, and nuclear material may have been disseminated to heaven knows where, while US troops, on orders, looked on and guarded the oil supply.

Meanwhile, lucrative contracts to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure and refurbish its oil industry are awarded to Administration cronies, without benefit of competitive bidding. Is there any wonder that the real motives of the US government are the subject of worldwide speculation and mistrust?

And in what may be the most damaging development, the US appears to be pushing off Iraq's clamor for self-government. The image of the boot on the throat has replaced the beckoning hand of freedom. Chaos and rioting only exacerbate that image. 'Regime change' in Iraq has so far meant anarchy, curbed only by an occupying military force and a US administrative presence that is evasive about if and when it intends to depart.

Indeed, we may have sparked a new international arms race as countries move ahead to develop WMDs as a last ditch attempt to ward off a possible preemptive strike from a newly belligerent US which claims the right to hit [when and] where it wants. In fact, there is little to constrain this President. Congress, in what will go down in history as its most unfortunate act, handed away its power to declare war for the foreseeable future and empowered this President to wage war at will.

But, I contend that, through it all, the people know. When it comes to shedding American blood – when it comes to wreaking havoc on civilians, on innocent men, women and children, callous dissembling is not acceptable. Nothing is worth that kind of lie – not oil, not revenge, not reelection, not somebody's grand pipedream of a democratic domino theory.

And mark my words, the calculated intimidation which we see so often of late by the "powers that be" will only keep the loyal opposition quiet for just so long. Because eventually, like it always does, the truth will emerge. And when it does, this house of cards, built of deceit, will fall.

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The preceding was excerpted from a speech given by Senator Byrd, May 21, 2003. Senator Byrd, from West Virginia, is often referred to as 'The Dean of the Congress'. For the full text of his speech to the Senate see <http://byrd.senate.gov>.

