

## The Farcical End Of The American Dream

The Us Press Is Supposed To Be Challenging The Lies Of This War  
by Robert Fisk; March 19, 2006 - ZNet

It is a bright winter morning and I am sipping my first coffee of the day in Los Angeles. My eye moves like a radar beam over the front page of the Los Angeles Times for the word that dominates the minds of all Middle East correspondents: Iraq. In post-invasion, post-Judith Miller mode, the American press is supposed to be challenging the lies of this war. So the story beneath the headline "In a Battle of Wits, Iraq's Insurgency Mastermind Stays a Step Ahead of US" deserves to be read. Or does it?

Datelined Washington - an odd city in which to learn about Iraq, you might think - its opening paragraph reads: "Despite the recent arrest of one of his would-be suicide bombers in Jordan and some top aides in Iraq, insurgency mastermind Abu Musab Zarqawi has eluded capture, US authorities say, because his network has a much better intelligence-gathering operation than they do."

Now quite apart from the fact that many Iraqis - along, I have to admit, with myself - have grave doubts about whether Zarqawi exists, and that al-Qai'da's Zarqawi, if he does exist, does not merit the title of "insurgency mastermind", the words that caught my eye were "US authorities say". And as I read through the report, I note how the Los Angeles Times sources this extraordinary tale. I thought American reporters no longer trusted the US administration, not after the mythical weapons of mass destruction and the equally mythical connections between Saddam and the international crimes against humanity of 11 September 2001. Of course, I was wrong.

Here are the sources - on pages one and 10 for the yarn spun by reporters Josh Meyer and Mark Mazzetti: "US officials said", "said one US Justice Department counter-terrorism official", "Officials ... said", "those officials said", "the officials confirmed", "American officials complained", "the US officials stressed", "US authorities believe", "said one senior US intelligence official", "US officials said", "Jordanian officials ... said" - here, at least is some light relief - "several US officials said", "the US officials said", "American officials said", "officials say", "say US officials", "US officials said", "one US counter-terrorism official said".

I do truly treasure this story. It proves my point that the Los Angeles Times - along with the big east coast dailies - should all be called US OFFICIALS SAY. But it's not just this fawning on political power that makes me despair. Let's move to a more recent example of what I can only call institutionalised racism in American reporting of Iraq. I have to thank reader Andrew Gorman for this gem, a January Associated Press report about the killing of an Iraqi prisoner under interrogation by US Chief Warrant Officer Lewis Welshofer Jnr.

Mr Welshofer, it transpired in court, had stuffed the Iraqi General Abed Hamed Mowhoush head-first into a sleeping bag and sat on his chest, an action which - not surprisingly - caused the general to expire. The military jury ordered - reader, hold your breath - a reprimand for Mr Welshofer, the forfeiting of \$6,000 of his salary and confinement to barracks for 60 days. But what caught my eye was the sympathetic detail. Welshofer's wife's Barbara, the AP told us, "testified that she was worried about providing for their three children if her husband was sentenced to prison. 'I love him more for fighting this,' she said, tears welling up in her eyes.

'He's always said that you need to do the right thing, and sometimes the right thing is the hardest thing to do'.

Yes, I guess torture is tough on the torturer. But try this from the same report: "Earlier in the day ... Mr Welshofer fought back tears. 'I deeply apologise if my actions tarnish the soldiers serving in Iraq,' he said."

Note how the American killer's remorse is directed not towards his helpless and dead victim but to the honour of his fellow soldiers, even though an earlier hearing had revealed that some of his colleagues watched Welshofer stuffing the general into the sleeping bag and did nothing to stop him. An earlier AP report stated that "officials" - here we go again - "believed Mowhoush had information that would 'break the back of the insurgency'." Wow. The general knew all about 40,000 Iraqi insurgents. So what a good idea to stuff him upside down inside a sleeping bag and sit on his chest.

But the real scandal about these reports is we're not told anything about the general's family. Didn't he have a wife? I imagine the tears were "welling up in her eyes" when she was told her husband had been done to death. Didn't the general have children? Or parents? Or any loved ones who "fought back tears" when told of this vile deed? Not in the AP report he didn't. General Mowhoush comes across as an object, a dehumanised creature who wouldn't let the Americans "break the back" of the insurgency after being stuffed headfirst into a sleeping bag.

Now let's praise the AP. On an equally bright summer's morning in Australia a few days ago I open the Sydney Morning Herald. It tells me, on page six, that the news agency, using the Freedom of Information Act, has forced US authorities to turn over 5,000 pages of transcripts of hearings at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp. One of them records the trial of since-released British prisoner Feroz Abbasi, in which Mr Abbasi vainly pleads with his judge, a US air force colonel, to reveal the evidence against him, something he says he has a right to hear under international law.

And here is what the American colonel replied: "Mr Abbasi, your conduct is unacceptable and this is your absolute final warning. I do not care about international law. I do not want to hear the words international law. We are not concerned about international law."

Alas, these words - which symbolise the very end of the American dream - are buried down the story. The colonel, clearly a disgrace to the uniform he wears, does not appear in the bland headline ("US papers tell Guantanamo inmates' stories") of the Sydney paper, more interested in telling us that the released documents identify by name the "farmers, shopkeepers or goatherds" held in Guantanamo.

I am now in Wellington, New Zealand, watching on CNN Saddam Hussein's attack on the Baghdad court trying him. And suddenly, the ghastly Saddam disappears from my screen. The hearing will now proceed in secret, turning this drumhead court into even more of a farce. It is a disgrace. And what does CNN respectfully tell us? That the judge has "suspended media coverage"!

If only, I say to myself, CNN - along with the American press - would do the same.