

DAILY MOJO

Mission Unaccomplished

By Tom Engelhardt

From the President's news conference—our leading historical revisionist strikes back and the malevolent press tries to trip him up:

“Q: Mr. President, if I may take you back to May 1st when you stood on the USS *Lincoln* under a huge banner that said, ‘Mission Accomplished.’ At that time you declared major combat operations were over, but since that time there have been over 1,000 wounded, many of them amputees who are recovering at Walter Reed, 217 killed in action since that date. Will you acknowledge now that you were premature in making those remarks?”

“THE PRESIDENT: Nora, I think you ought to look at my speech. I said, Iraq is a dangerous place and we’ve still got hard work to do, there’s still more to be done. And we had just come off a very successful military operation. I was there to thank the troops.

“The ‘Mission Accomplished’ sign, of course, was put up by the members of the USS Abraham Lincoln, saying that their mission was accomplished. I know it was attributed somehow to some ingenious advance man from my staff—they weren’t that ingenious, by the way. . .

“Q: Thank you, Mr. President. You recently put Condoleezza Rice, your National Security Advisor, in charge of the management of the administration’s Iraq policy. What has effectively changed since she’s been in charge? And the second question, can you promise a year from now that you will have reduced the number of troops in Iraq?”

“THE PRESIDENT: The second question is a trick question, so I won’t answer it.”

Our leaders who spoke with one voice, now speak in tongues:

The President during his oval office meeting with L. Paul Bremer (who seems to spend as much time rushing back to Washington as he does in Baghdad): “The more successful we are on the ground, the more these killers will react. . . The more progress we make on the ground, the more free the Iraqis become, the more electricity is available, the more jobs are available, the more kids that are going to school, the more desperate these killers become, because they can’t stand the thought of a free society.”

Sen. John F. Kerry “likened Bush’s statement to the ‘light at the end of the tunnel’ claims during the Vietnam War. ‘Does the president really believe that suicide bombers are willing to strap explosives to their bodies because we’re restoring electricity and creating jobs for Iraqis?’”

Sen. John McCain: “This is the first time that I have seen a parallel to Vietnam, in terms of information that the administration is putting out versus the actual situation on the ground.”

White House press secretary Scott McClellan: “Our military leaders have said that some of these attacks have become more sophisticated, but what you’re really seeing is that the more progress we make, the more desperate these killers become.”

(The three above quotes from Dana Milbank and Thomas E. Ricks, *Bush Says Attacks Are Reflection of U.S. Gains*, *the Washington Post*)

Brig. Gen. Jack Dempsey, a senior officer in the division told [Paul] Wolfowitz, according to *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius, who traveled to Baghdad with the undersecretary of defense, that the launcher which loosed the missiles on the al-Rashid Hotel, one of which struck a floor below Wolfowitz “was a ‘Rube Goldberg device’ and that its crudeness indicated the weakness of the forces opposing U.S. occupation, rather than their strength. He insisted, as Wolfowitz did through his quick trip here, that the security situation is actually improving in Iraq.” (David Ignatius, *Volley of Rockets Shatters a Life and Images of Stability*)

L. Paul Bremer, viceroy of Baghdad in “an unusual admission during an interview with ABC Television”: “I think we have to recognize that, as time goes on, being occupied becomes a problem.”

Secretary of state Colin Powell: “We are in this insurgency situation where people strike and run and it’s a much more difficult security environment. We did not expect this would be quite this intense for so long.” (The above two quotes from Michael Howard, *U.S. hawk escapes Baghdad rocket attack*, *the Guardian*)

The military chips in: “What Gen. Dempsey was saying was that we had not seen an attack that we could directly attribute to foreign fighters,” Brig. Gen. Mark Hertling, his deputy, said at a news conference after the attacks. ‘We have seen those today. . . .’

“But other U.S. commanders in Iraq appeared skeptical that foreign fighters posed much of a threat right now. “We have not seen a large influx of foreign fighters thus far,” said Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, the commander of the 4th Infantry Division, which covers much of the Sunni Triangle north and west of Baghdad.

“For many inside and outside the military, the car bombings, coming on the first day of Ramadan, brought to mind the 1968 Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War, which marked the lunar new year. ‘Like Tet 1968 in Vietnam, it is a religious holiday that is being used to show us the extent of the strength of the bad guys,’ said retired Air Force Col. Sam Gardiner, an expert in strategy who has taught at the National War College.” (Vernon Loeb, *New Enemy May Require New Tactics*, *the Washington Post*)

L. Paul Bremer, this time on the terrible pass to which all utopian dreams come: “I need the money so bad we have to move off our principled opposition to the international community being in charge.” (Herbert Docena, *Spoilers gatecrash the Iraq spoils party*, *Asia Times*)

And now for the good news:

Paul Wolfowitz gives the Iraqis something to dream about: “When he was asked whether the administration’s plan to restore the Iraqi economy is stuck in first gear, [Paul Wolfowitz] quoted the Polish commander, Maj. Gen. Andrzej Tyszkiewicz, who was the host at a lunch at the multinational division’s headquarters at Hilla. The general said Poland had been free of Communist rule for almost a decade and a half, and still unemployment ran at 18 percent.” (Thom Shanker, *Wolfowitz, Planner of War, Sees It Up Close*, *the New York Times*)

Why we are not in Vietnam:

Let's see, after the car bombings in Baghdad and the rocket attack on the al-Rashid Hotel as well as various deadly attacks on American troops and on contractors rebuilding Iraq, today a car bomb went off by a police station in Falluja, nine Ukrainian troops were wounded in an ambush well south of Baghdad (the first significant casualties in the Polish-controlled zone), the first M1 Abrams main battle tank was destroyed (by a roadside bomb) since the end of major combat May 1 (with the deaths of two Americans and the wounding of a third), and two days later, the occupation authorities reported that a deputy mayor of Baghdad was assassinated in a drive-by shooting. Progress, it seems, is breaking out everywhere. In the meantime, our leaders descending from the dreamy heavens of global control and a remade Middle East find themselves again in a very American hell—Vietnam. As it turns out, they live in an exceedingly small world. It's imperial democracy or it's Tet all over again.

When the President vows, as yesterday, to “stay the course” and focuses on schools being reopened and other good works he begins to sound increasingly like a Vietnam-era president or two, right down to the verbal playbook. In fact, as categories either “progress” or “Vietnam” says, I suspect, a good deal more about where our leaders are living at the moment than what's actually going on in Iraq (and yes, god save me, I almost wrote “Vietnam” there).

Middle East expert Juan Cole offers this comment on the sur-reality of the present confused American chorus:

“The attacks left Baghdad shaken and nervous. U.S. officials actually came out and said that progress in Iraq cannot be measured by a few bombs going off! Uh, without security nothing else follows, friends. Not financial investments, not NGO aid, not more troops sent by allies. The Red Cross is needed for Iraq's reconstruction, but it is likely more or less to get out of Iraq now. The U.N. has already largely been chased out.”

And Doctors without Borders is now standing down. Oh, and by the way, I wouldn't count on all of that \$13 billion raised at the Madrid conference, a surprising percentage of which was in loans anyway, actually making it to this particular version of Iraq, which is most distinctly not Vietnam.

A *Los Angeles Times* piece, *Attack Is a Media Coup for Iraq Resistance, Experts Say*, by Alissa J. Rubin makes the non-Vietnam point clearly enough:

“We are looking at a series of insurgencies: One is Islamic nationalist. One is remnants of the ex-regime. One is generalized frustration with the occupation,” said Dodge, of the Royal Institute.

“Baghdad University's [political scientist Jabber] Habib said the resistance's lack of any political ideology might also be a symptom of the diverse opposition forces, whose ultimate goals for Iraq diverge sharply. Islamists and Al Qaeda sympathizers would like to see a theocratic state while many former members of Hussein's Baath Party would welcome a return to a secular regime as long as they regained power.

“In other places with resistance movements, such as the Palestinian territories and Northern Ireland, there are typically political and military wings, Habib said. ‘This resistance has no political ideas, or wings, or leaders or spokesmen.’”

This may be an exaggeration, but not by much. There is no Ho Chi Minh here, no revolutionary ideology, no North Vietnam just next store, no great rear areas (the Soviet Union and China); nor are we in a country whose unification has been thwarted by the

Great Powers of the day, but one that threatens at any moment to split into three parts. In the Vietnam era, one often heard from the American grunts that they couldn't tell the enemy from the civilian population, but at the level of leadership there was never any question about whom we were facing. In Iraq, the opposition, such as it is, is faceless to the Americans, puzzling and unknown. It does not issue statements or take credit for attacks. But that hardly means there is no political strategy and no message. Quite the opposite. The strategy is becoming clearer and the messages seem to be embedded in the acts themselves.

At some level, complex as Iraq itself may be, the messages being delivered by a growing resistance movement possibly united only by its anti-imperial, anti-occupation views seem not so complicated. And they *are* sending us a message. As Habib of Baghdad University commented, "They are picking targets for their media value," he said, noting that the [al-Rashid] hotel is well known as the Baghdad residence of many civilian members of the American-led coalition, as well as some senior U.S. military officers." That makes sense to me. It may be that our leaders are living in their own tiny world, bounded by an imperial utopia on one side and a fearful descent into the Vietnam "quagmire" on the other, but the resisters in Iraq are living with the rest of us in a far larger world, however uncomfortably we all share it.

As was clear from al-Qaeda's September 11th attacks, we all, whether in LA, Washington, Baghdad, or Kabul watch the same movies—this is one thing globalization means. It used to be that Americans worried about how "violence" in the movies and on television was affecting American children. Now, if you show a dirigible going into a football stadium, a kidnapped train loaded with explosives, a bus wired to a bomb, or... it's likely to be a global learning experience. And whether in the Bekaa Valley, the Sunni Triangle, or New York, everyone knows when prime time is and what TV news cameras are attracted to.

Don't think that only Americans saw that banner on the USS *Abraham Lincoln* that the President now denies was created by his own people. (Strange, don't you think, that he waited so many months to disavow it?) They know that the brag—"Mission Accomplished"—was his, however much he wiggles now. (See *Bush Steps Away from Victory Banner*, the *New York Times*)

The message of the most recent attacks in Iraq seems clear enough: Mission unaccomplished, get out! It's hardly more complicated than that. Get out of your hotel. Get out of your headquarters. Get out of the NGO business. Get out of town. All of you. No distinctions. No free passes. And we don't give a damn what you think of us! No one is going to be safe in proximity to the occupation, its forces and its administrators. No one involved in the "reconstruction" of Iraq is going to be safe. And no one who works with the Americans, foreign or Iraqi, is safe either.

The message clearly goes something like that. And with it goes a genuine political strategy. The United States is to be isolated as an occupying power, cut off from allies or helpers of any sort. Reconstruction is to be undermined and made ever more expensive, while the occupation authorities are to be provoked into acts that will only create more opposition. That this strategy is being carried out, as far as we know, without the benefit of an enunciated political ideology or issued statements of intent, that it is being carried out by people ready to die in cars packed with explosives and others hiding bombs at the sides of roads, that it is relatively indiscriminate (there's a message in that, too—don't even walk near those people) and cruel doesn't make it less a message or a strategy of resistance.

In fact, as Robert Fisk, reporter for the British *Independent*, pointed out in a new piece (included below), the message should be unbearably familiar to us: "You're either with us or you're against us." He added: "In Baghdad, the political message of the weekend was simple. It told Iraqis that the Americans cannot control Iraq; more importantly, it told Americans that they cannot control Iraq. Even more important, it told Iraqis they

shouldn't work for the Americans. Who wants to be an Iraqi policeman this morning? It also acknowledged America's new rules of combat: kill the enemy leaders."

And here's the thing: our leaders may be stuck in Vietnam, but the resisters, whomever they are, are ready to take lessons from all over—from Lebanon, from Algiers, from the occupied territories, yes, from Vietnam, and even from our movies. Why not?

In the Detroit Free Press, veteran Middle Eastern journalist Lawrence Pintak considered the lessons anyone might draw from our Lebanese experience some twenty-odd years ago (Lessons of Beirut lost in Baghdad):

"It all seemed so simple. Send in U.S. forces. Free and protect the local population. Install a pro-Western government acceptable to all factions. Build a wider Middle East peace. Then depart to the cheers of a grateful citizenry. But President Ronald Reagan's encounter with Lebanon did not go nearly as smoothly as he had expected. Now, two decades later, another U.S. administration is lost on the road map to peace. . . America's brief encounter with Lebanon lasted less than two years. But it was long enough to show the world that a handful of men and women with a few hundred pounds of explosives and a willingness to sacrifice their lives could bring a superpower to its knees. The anti-American militants have learned their lessons well; the same cannot be said for inhabitants of the White House. . . "We will stay the course. We will complete our job," Bush declared as part of the administration's new Iraq public relations campaign. Reagan said much the same thing when the suicide attacks began in Beirut."

Okay, what's happening in Baghdad and elsewhere in central and northern Iraq is brutal and basic. But so far it's looking awfully effective. And, believe me, whoever they are, they know that Americans are watching. If, via the Internet, Iraqi resisters aren't checking out the latest Zogby, Gallup and CNN polls, I'll eat my url.

It's already getting harder to recall all that bravado from our President and his pals. Remember when Donald Rumsfeld was acting like a stand-up comic at his press conferences, having the time of his life? Well, check him out now, if you want to sense how far we've come. Was it only a month ago that administration strategists were brilliantly proclaiming that we'd trapped the enemy in Iraq, which was so much "flypaper" for terrorists? Could that really have been so recently? Can events truly be moving this fast?

Here's what Paul Rogers, geopolitical analyst for the openDemocracy website has to say about that: (America's Iraqi Dilemma):

"In July, President George W. Bush strongly emphasised and even welcomed—with gung-ho phrases like "bring 'em on"—the fact that the U.S. presence in Iraq would act as a real attraction to Islamic militants. The prospect of Iraq becoming the new focus for the 'war on terror'—enabling U.S. forces to concentrate on destroying elements of al-Qaida and their associates—was described as the 'fly-paper' theory of counter-terrorism; Iraq being the fly-paper, the U.S. forces the insecticide and Islamic militants the flies.

"It is a crude if curiously attractive theory but it may be faulty in one crucial aspect. What is now happening in Iraq—even before any sustained al-Qaida activity develops there—suggests that it is the Americans who are becoming the flies."

Two views of the Wolf at bay:

Thom Shanker of the *New York Times*:

“The day had begun violently with a rocket attack on the Rashid Hotel, where he was staying, but Paul D. Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense, betrayed no sign of frustration or pessimism as his Air Force jet headed back to Washington late Sunday night.

“We have witnessed or heard about hundreds of individual acts of courage by Iraqis and by Americans and by the other coalition partners who are working together to build a new and free Iraq,” Mr. Wolfowitz told reporters. . . The affirmations of progress in the face of the continuing violence seemed to reflect both the Bush administration’s determination to maintain a positive outlook on Iraq and his own personal investment in Washington’s policy. . . Mr. Wolfowitz swears that his practical judgment is not clouded by optimism and faith, and each stop on his whirlwind trip was meant as a data point for his argument.”

Juan Cole offers this view (Was Wolfowitz the Target?):

“Wolfowitz’s trip was an unadulterated disaster. His announcement that he was sleeping in Tikrit was clearly a dig at Saddam and the Baathists; but then a Blackhawk [helicopter] was downed there while he was at the U.S. base in Tikrit. . . And then his hotel was struck in Baghdad, with a U.S. colonel killed and 17 other persons wounded, several of them military. Wolfowitz was visibly shaken, his voice quavering, immediately after the attack. U.S. personnel were forced out of the hotel, perhaps permanently. The colonel was probably the highest ranking officer killed in Iraq so far. . .

“The problem with Wolfowitz’s trips to Iraq is that they are clearly political, requiring visits to touchy places such as Najaf and Tikrit, to make political points about U.S. dominance of the country. But the Deputy Secretary of Defense should only be visiting Iraq for military reasons, and his visits should be conducted secretly so he can see military commanders and troops. If Wolfowitz goes on campaigning to be mayor of Tikrit, he is liable to get himself killed.

“Even short of that, every time he goes he makes himself look clownish, and makes the U.S. look like fools. Wolfowitz is the one who wanted 7 wars and kept talking patronizingly about the ability of the U.S. to reshape Iraq and the Middle East, and he can’t even get a good night’s sleep when he is there.”

But for the moment let’s leave the last word on American-policy-as-unadulterated-disaster to an irritated Turkish foreign minister, Abdullah Gul, who, according to *Agence France Presse*, “charged” in what can only pass for a polite understatement (Turkey slams U.S. ‘ineptitude’ in request for troops to Iraq),

“that the United States had been inept in handling a request for Turkish troops to be sent to neighbouring Iraq to help its forces there. . . ‘Of course, there is ineptitude here. First they came, very enthusiastic, and said ‘please do not be late’ and then they saw that there are many different issues. They have many hesitations themselves,’ Gul was quoted as telling reporters. . . ‘The Americans do not know the region very well. They did not pay much attention to the advice given to them. If the officials who are currently administering Iraq had known the region better, things would be better today.’”

Meanwhile back on the home front, straws in the wind:

Here are the latest polling figures on American attitudes toward the war in Iraq: A USA Today-CNN-Gallup Poll just taken:

“finds that 50 percent of Americans disapprove of the way the administration has managed the situation in the nearly six months since major fighting ended in Iraq on May 1. That is up sharply from the 18 percent who disapproved in late April, when it was assumed U.S. troops had secured the country.

“With daily headlines trumpeting new attacks against the occupying forces, public resolve for staying the course also appears to be fading. A majority of 57 percent now says the United States should withdraw some or all of its troops. That is up considerably from two months ago when 46 percent said to withdraw some or all troops.”

Talk about this not being Vietnam, it took years for the polls to reach such a point during that war—and endless years for morale in the military to fall and for military resistance to rise to such a point that the antiwar movement began to resemble something close to a military-led movement (with Vietnam Veterans Against the War in its forefront). Now, the news from within the military in Iraq and at home is of a very different nature. In the military, there have been AWOLs, suicides, rare diseases, underreported casualties (see Seth Porges, *Press Underreports Wounded in Iraq, Editor & Publisher*), badly treated wounded soldiers warehoused at a military base in Georgia, overstretched reserves, unhappy military, National Guard and reserve families deluging congressional representatives with demands to bring their sons, daughters or relatives home, and less than six months after the last major antiwar demonstration as the war was starting, the antiwar movement has again taken to the streets, this time led, in part, by outraged military families.

A fine piece on this development appeared in the British *Guardian*—this sort of reportage is still far harder to find in the U.S. media. Suzanne Goldenberger offers the following from the mother of a boy who died in Iraq (Dissent on the home front: families of U.S. soldiers in Iraq lead anti-war protests):

“‘I don’t care what the administration says about flag-waving and children throwing flowers. It is just not true. The stories coming back are horrific. All he told me was that he had seen and done some horrible things, that they had all done and seen some terrible things.’

“The stories coming back from Iraq have helped to chip away at the culture of stoicism. So have the circumstances of the deployment. An underclass that grew up to view military services as a ticket to advancement or a college education now finds itself going off to two distant wars—in Afghanistan and Iraq—in less than two years.”

Unfortunately, I missed the demonstration in Washington last weekend, something I regret. But I have no doubt I’ll soon enough have another chance to march. After all, it’s begun again, as I’ve long expected it would. I’ve never doubted that the antiwar movement of the prewar moment remained emotionally in place and that it would reappear and, over time, gain strength. Let me then simply offer three bits of purely anecdotal evidence of the range of opposition that does exist in our country at the moment and is only bound to grow over time.

First, here’s part of an account by a young activist and friend of mine, scribbled down on the bus home from the Washington demonstration:

“I’d been trying to drum up interest among friends. . . about attending the protest for the past few months. But heard the same story again and again, ‘I’m so busy,’ ‘Why should I? Bush will just do what he wants anyway,’ etc. . . . Not one member of my usual protest cadre decided to go and with even my wife out of town, I boarded a bus at Broadway and 179th by myself. I was going it alone.

“Boy did they miss out. It was the largest protest event I’ve been to since the war in Iraq began and it felt great to get back out in the street with so many people. The folks who did get out in D.C. were anything but sluggish and demoralized. Without a group of my own, I began walking up and down the line as the marchers left the field at the Washington Monument. . . I looked for a group of anarchists to join, but couldn’t seem to locate any, so I decided to seek out the loudest group I could. I found a great group of people, mostly college-age kids, sporting International Socialist Organization signs and just melded right into their group. It was fantastic! They were so loud and dynamic, with a full corps of drummers (some with actual snares, others with painters’ buckets) and a revolving crew of energetic chant-leaders outfitted with portable micro- and mega-phones. They kept the group upbeat, motivated and, most of all, loud throughout the entire march. They even taught me a few new anti-war cheers (and jeers). It was absolutely beautiful to be a part of their action-faction and I felt right at home amidst the fiery group.

“Looking back on it, as I ride the bus back to NYC, I’d say it put the April 12, 2003 D.C. March to shame. I don’t know what the actual numbers were at either (maybe 20–30,000 then and 10–20,000 today), but to me, this latest demo was 10x louder and impassioned! Just wait until the August 2004 protests at the Republican National Convention. . .”

Next, in the opposition-from-beyond-the-grave category, an obituary (slightly shortened) published in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* on October 2 and spotted by a friend):

“Word has been received that Gertrude M. Jones, 81, passed away on August 25, 2003 . . . She was a native of Lebanon, KY. She was a retired Vice President of Georgia International Life Insurance. . . Two daughters survive her: Dawn Hunt and her live-in boyfriend, Roland. . . and three sisters, four grandchildren and three great grandchildren. . . Funeral services were held in Louisville, KY. Memorial gifts may be made to any organization that seeks the removal of President George Bush from office.”

Finally, a letter to the editor of the Portland *Oregonian* sent in by a reader with the comment that it “should be enlarged, framed, and circulated to every newspaper in the nation. It’s got to be unique. And it is from a fellow resident of Salem, one whom I’d like to meet.” It appeared under the headline, “‘I apologize’ for voting for Bush”:

“I’m a registered Republican. I voted for George W. Bush and contributed financially to his campaign. I was wrong. I apologize. Bush is the worst president America has had—ever.

“Bush has turned the entire world against America. He has lied to the American people and gotten us in a terrible mess in Iraq. There were no Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that threatened America. There was no Iraqi connection with international terrorism.

“Before Sept. 11, 2001, there were a few hundred Saudi and Egyptian terrorists. Bush’s policies since 9/11 have created hundreds of thousands of new terrorist recruits throughout the Muslim world. Bush created this monster.

“We are wasting our national treasure in Iraq due to Bush’s arrogant ‘pre-emptive warfare’ doctrine. We lost 3 million jobs since Bush took office—and we are exporting our remaining manufacturing and high-tech jobs to low-wage countries at a dizzying pace.

“We are piling up massive deficits that will ultimately create chaos in our economy.

“Bush must be replaced.”

The Iraqi vortex swallows all explanations except for the anti-imperial ones that two hundred years of history tell us can’t be wrong:

Perhaps the most devastating article of recent days—when it comes to administration explanations of anything—appeared in the *Washington Post*. There, Barton Gellman (Search in Iraq Fails to Find Nuclear Threat) wrote about the search for Iraq’s nuclear arsenal, or nuclear program, or nuclear anything. I’m sure all of you remember the mushroom cloud that rose time and again over the administration’s explanations of their onrushing invasion of Saddam’s Iraq. Okay, now we know there was no nuclear program. But the devastating point of Gellman’s piece isn’t that it didn’t exist post-1991, but that they knew it didn’t exist—back when—and no one bothered to tell us.

“According to records made available to The Washington Post and interviews with arms investigators. . . , it did not require a comprehensive survey to find the central assertions of the Bush administration’s prewar nuclear case to be insubstantial or untrue. Although Hussein did not relinquish his nuclear ambitions or technical records, investigators said, it is now clear he had no active program to build a weapon, produce its key materials or obtain the technology he needed for either.

“Among the closely held internal judgments of the Iraq Survey Group, overseen by David Kay as special representative of CIA Director George J. Tenet, are that Iraq’s nuclear weapons scientists did no significant arms-related work after 1991, that facilities with suspicious new construction proved benign, and that equipment of potential use to a nuclear program remained under seal or in civilian industrial use.”

Note that “closely held internal judgments.” Of key Iraqi nuclear scientists, one, Gellman tells us, was shot in his car by the Marines at a checkpoint; a second waited two weeks for an American knock on his door (and when it didn’t come that just turned out to be the beginning of his bizarre adventures with the American occupiers).

But far more striking in the Gellman piece is this little bit of information: “Fewer than one-tenth of 1 percent of the search personnel had nuclear assignments, about a dozen out of 1,500 at the peak strength of the Iraq Survey Group.” And those few were, in fact, so idle and read so many novels to pass the time that they began calling themselves the “book of the month club.” In other words, based on the very assignments doled out, it’s clear that no one, from the beginning of the post-war “search,” seriously imagined the Iraqis had a functional nuclear program. Oh and those evil aluminum tubes? Feggedaboutit. No one, it turns out, took them seriously either.

A mushroom cloud? Maybe they meant a cloud of psychedelic mushrooms and that was what they then fed the American people.

If you want to read an amazing tale of nuclear folly—sex, lies, and videotape, without the sex or the videotape—check out Gellman, and then, should you want to form your

own “survey team” and look for an actual nuclear program that might be of some danger to us all, I suggest your first stop might be Julian Coman’s piece, Pentagon wants ‘mini-nukes’ to fight terrorists, in the British *Telegraph*. Kay’s survey team, it turns out, has just been barking up the wrong silo:

“Influential advisers at the Pentagon are backing the development of a new generation of low-yield nuclear weapons—so-called mini-nukes—in a controversial report to be published this autumn. . .

“The [Pentagon’s Defence Science Board] DSB’s findings envisage a revamped nuclear arsenal made up of small-scale missiles whose explosive impact would be easier to control and could be targeted at smaller aggressive states. The most radical part of the report argues for a move away from the Cold War view of nuclear arms as catastrophic weapons of last resort.

“The document is believed to have the strong backing of Donald Rumsfeld, the defence secretary, who last week called for a ‘bolder’ approach to national security in a leaked Pentagon memo. . .”

And in one of those oldie-but-goodie categories for horrific weapons systems that, like those proverbial old soldiers, never die, there was this charming line: “Among the weapons programmes proposed is an enhanced neutron bomb, capable of destroying deeply buried biological weapons caches.” For those old enough to remember, the neutron bomb, whose claim to fame was that it killed humans but supposedly preserved property, had, most of us thought, long been tossed into the garbage pail of history. But with this administration, no such luck.

Oh, and if your survey team has some significant financial backing you might want to don your space suit and take off for the heavens which is where the Pentagon is thinking about caching its next arsenal of deadly weaponry. That must be why, as James Carroll discusses in his latest column in the *Boston Globe* (see below), we’ve rejected the very idea of further treaty-making to keep space demilitarized.

No evil rogue dictators up there, just little old us. Or, as Carroll comments,

“What makes this situation so ominous is that the Pentagon’s aggressive strategic planning for space and the Bush administration’s rejection of treaty restraints are not only unchallenged in the U.S. political discourse but are largely unnoted. . . Who is warning of the Bush-sponsored resumption of the arms race? And where is the defense of the idea, once sacred to Americans, that outer space marks a threshold across which human beings must not drag the ancient perversion of war?”

Oh, and then there’s that final explanation for the Iraq war, that ultimate threshold when all else collapses. At least we downed a terrible dictator who mistreated his people horribly (all too true) and that justified the war—there’s a principle to stand by. Okay, but the question both George Monbiot (Tony Blair’s new friend) and Paul Krugman (*A Willful Ignorance*) took up in similar columns yesterday was how we could then justify supporting the terrible dictator of Uzbekistan, known for torturing his subjects or simply murdering them with boiling water? Monbiot points out:

“But Uzbekistan is seen by the U.S. government as a key western asset, as Saddam Hussein’s Iraq once was. Since 1999, U.S. special forces have been training Karimov’s soldiers. In October 2001, he gave the United States permission to use Uzbekistan as an airbase for its war against the Taliban. The Taliban have now been overthrown, but the U.S. has no intention of moving out. Uzbekistan is in the middle of central Asia’s massive gas and

oil fields. It is a nation for whose favours both Russia and China have been vying. Like Saddam Hussein's Iraq, it is a secular state fending off the forces of Islam."

Then again, who needs an explanation when we have Paul Wolfowitz?