



PHOTO: AFP  
This bird's eye view shows protesters gathered at the roundabout near the US embassy in Jakarta on March 30, to protest against the US-led war on Iraq. Around 200,000 people gathered in front of the United States embassy in the Indonesian capital in the biggest anti-war rally yet in the world's largest Muslim-populated nation.

## They do not know what they are doing or why they are doing it

THE INDEPENDENT, London

Every day public statements on the war are made with great bravado by British and US leaders. A day later most of them turn out to be inaccurate or untrue. Political leaders are understandably evasive about the detailed military strategy, but these evasions and 'inaccuracies' have nothing to do with the movements of the troops.

Without qualification Tony Blair declared at the joint press conference with President Bush last week that two British soldiers had been "executed". Shortly afterwards distressed relatives were informed that the soldiers had died in combat. A junior minister was despatched to make the appropriate public apologies. On the same day that Mr Blair spoke of the "executions", the Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon claimed that the discovery of protection suits in Iraq was "categorical proof" that Saddam possessed chemical weapons. He withdrew the claim within 24 hours.

Today we report that Mr Blair

greatly exaggerated the scale of humanitarian aid being shipped to Basra. Half the load of a naval ship consists of food and other supplies from Britain. The rest of the ship is stuffed full of arms and ammunition. As the head of emergencies at Christian Aid writes opposite, Iraq needs the equivalent of 32 such ships to deal with the humanitarian crisis. Most preposterous of all, Mr Blair and the US leaders said with certainty in advance that the "liberators" would be cheered in the streets. Now we are told that our war leaders always knew the cheers would be delayed and that they are not at all surprised that Iraqis are resisting their liberators.

So the obfuscation over the causes of war continues now the war has started. Before the war began the reasons for the conflict shifted constantly. One day the objective was to remove the weapons of mass destruction, the next it was regime change and the day after that it was a "war of liberation". An old PhD thesis was paraded as evidence that Saddam was a threat to the world and had to be dealt with by war. The "UN route" was followed, but only so long

as the UN agreed with the US and Britain. When the UN "failed to agree" Britain and the US blamed the UN. Each time President Bush or Tony Blair were questioned about a previously declared objective or statement, which had since changed, they appeared irritated or bewildered.

The leaders believed what they were saying on that particular day. Now the same sequence is recurring over the conflict itself. Statements made with apparent certainty are later contradicted by the facts or "clarified" by a new ministerial statement. The pattern is already extending itself to what will happen after the war, with linguistic games being played to cover up divisions and uncertainty about the political "reconstruction" of Iraq.

The persistent inaccuracies, proclaimed so confidently, expose the great flaw of this war. President Bush and Tony Blair were never clear about why it was being conducted and what would happen once it had ended. If they were not clear in their own minds it is hardly

surprising that their public statements fail to make much coherent sense.

From before 11 September Iraq was "on the agenda" of the divided Bush administration for reasons that would require the assistance of a psychiatrist, as well as political and military analysts. They decided on war long ago and then went about searching for the precise reasons. Even less thought has been given as to how the war will end and what will happen in the immediate aftermath.

It has been a constant theme in US newspapers, most of whom support the war, while despairing over the lack of planning. That is what is so worrying about the shifting arguments and statements from the political leaders. They do not know what they are doing or why they are doing it. They are fighting an unnecessary war and are still trying to find the reasons to justify it, even though the conflict has started and lives are being lost.

## Confusing US briefings frustrate news media

REUTERS, Doha/Washington

One US television network has already voted with its feet and reduced its staff.

Many journalists at the main US headquarters for the Iraq war say they get plenty of spin but little news.

A reporter for New York magazine, frustrated at the lack of light being shed on the war, asked this question last week to applause from colleagues:

"Why should we stay? What's the value to us for what we learn at this million-dollar press center?"

Journalists from Britain, Washington's chief ally in the war, feel so starved of information in Qatar that they have put up a sign quoting this remark at a briefing by British forces commander Air Marshall Brian Burridge:

"We don't do detail."

US broadcasters CNN, NBC and CBS all said they sent relatively small teams to As Sayliya Camp, the US Central Command forward headquarters on the bleak outskirts of Doha's capital, Qatar, and had no plans to scale back.

Fox was not available for comment and ABC said it did not discuss staff levels. One network executive, however, said privately that it had withdrawn around a dozen people.

During the 1991 Gulf War, the executive said, most of the news on how the conflict with Iraq was going for US-led forces came from the main briefing center and US commander Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf.

"Now with all the embedded journalists (attached to US and British units) the briefings are much more reactive to the main news of the day," the executive told Reuters

And some recent briefings have either been ignored by television networks or liberally cut away from in favor of more compelling news than the sight of US officers saying little more than that the controversial invasion is "on plan."

An official from another network put it like this: "They are playing catch-up sometimes and that somehow reduces the value."

Around 600 journalists, known by the Pentagon as "embeds", are attached to US and British military units and often report on frontline developments long before Doha, Washington or London know what is going on.

More than 700 journalists are accredited in Doha. Many are becoming openly contemptuous of the daily proceedings that US General Tommy Franks, in one of only two appearances since the war began, called a "platform for truth."

## Internet sites rage at US, but Laden silent

AFP, Dubai

Osama bin Laden, usually eager to rally Muslims by highlighting US "atrocities" around the world, has not been heard from 10 days into the US-led war on Iraq, leading to new speculation on his fate.

Bin Laden's silence comes amid a flurry of militant rhetoric on Islamist websites in defense of Iraq and in praise of a suicide attack Saturday outside the central city of Najaf that killed four US soldiers.

"This is only the beginning!... Thank God!... Let's pray for our martyred hero!... Damned be the evildoers and hypocrites!" exclaimed one message on the qal3ah.org site.

Yasser al-Sirri, director of the London-based Islamic Observatory, said it was possible that bin Laden's al-Qaeda network or groups claiming its name would soon "move into action."

"They're probably waiting for the right comment. A statement that doesn't come before an action would be worthless," he said.

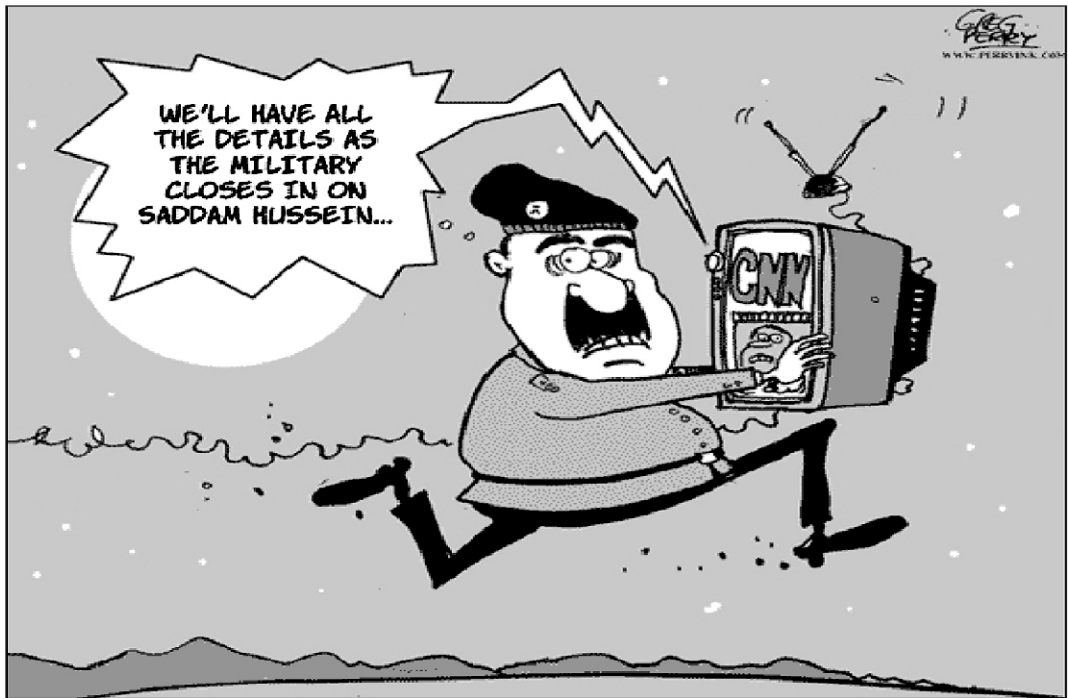
Abdul Bari Atwan, editor-in-chief of the London-based Arabic daily al-Quds al-Arabi, said: "It seems al-Qaeda doesn't want to express itself through threats and prefers to go through action."

However, US officials have also been trumpeting recent progress in their campaign to eliminate al-Qaeda.



PHOTO: AFP

Scott's Dragoons check civilians at Bridge Four, just outside Basra on Saturday. Coalition troops surrounding Basra targeted Iraq's ruling Baath Party by wiping out a gathering of some 200 followers and demolishing a giant statue of President Saddam Hussein in the country's second city.



## Kuwait installs new defence system

AFP, Kuwait City

Kuwait said it was installing a new defence system hours after a Silkworm missile became the first projectile fired from Iraq to hit the heart of the emirate's capital.

Defence authorities are "sparring no effort" in protecting the country against further missile attacks, First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah told the state KUNA news agency, without giving details of the new system.

The low-flying missile struck the country's largest and most popular shopping mall, Souk Sharq, at around 1:45 am (2245 GMT), landing just offshore and causing limited structural damage to the sprawling seaside structure.

## Turkey has 'legitimate concern' in N Iraq: US

AFP, Ankara

Turkey has "legitimate concerns" in northern Iraq, but should not intervene there militarily without "sufficient justification," a senior US official said here Saturday.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, made his comments shortly after Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Washington his country would decide by itself whether and when to send troops into northern Iraq, an area controlled by Iraqi Kurdish factions.

"Turkey should not go into northern Iraq unless there is sufficient justification and no better way of dealing with it," the official

said.

The United States wants to avoid "a war within a war" breaking out in northern Iraq between Kurdish factions and Turkish forces who harbour deep suspicions about each other's motives, he said.

Iraqi Kurds fear Turkey wants to occupy their region for the long term.

Turkey fears the Kurds might declare a separate state, a move which could reignite a secessionist rebellion among its own Kurdish minority just across the border.

Turkey has given a number of reasons for its possible intervention, including dealing with a

sudden influx of war refugees or renewed threats from Turkish Kurdish rebels belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Ankara has agreed however not to deploy any additional forces in northern Iraq "in the immediate future" and to do so "only if necessary" and "in coordination" with the United States, the US official said.

The Turkish army has long maintained a military presence of several thousand troops inside Iraq to fight the PKK.

It recently deployed some 50,000 additional troops along the border for a possible large-scale intervention in case the war in Iraq should spawn turmoil in the border

region.

Iraqi Kurdish leaders, who recognize that setting up a separate state is "not realistic", have agreed not to try to seize Kirkuk, an oil-rich town currently held by the forces of Saddam Hussein, and not to call for a rebellion of Kurds now living in the city, the US official also said.

He acknowledged that Ankara had expressed concern that local Kurds might take over the city, a move that could boost their claim - both economically and politically -- to a separate state.

Kurdish fighters have advanced on Kirkuk over the past couple of days as Iraqi forces fell back from their advanced positions around the city.

## Iranian factor of Iraq war

PRAVDA ONLINE

Everything that is going on in Iraq concerns Iran above all. They are both geographic and "axis-of-evil" neighbours. Iran's official reaction to the current Iraqi developments is "active neutrality".

Neutrality does not come easily to Teheran. Especially because the Shiite majority inhabiting Iraq and Iran is the stronghold of this direction of Islam. Now fighting is on in the territory where their holy cities are found - Najaf and Kerbela.

At that, both Iraqi and American missiles are falling on Iran and refugees may flow in any time. In cooperation with other states in the region, such as Syria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, Iran is going to participate in the post-war development of Iraq so as to prevent its disintegration.

In the meantime, Iran is being neutral. The leadership of Iran has said many times that it backs neither Baghdad, nor Washington. What's more, the statement of the

Islamic propaganda council, calling on Iranians to protest against the war in Iraq, says that "the Islamic Republic of Iran has serious differences with each of the warring sides".

Teheran has also declared it will not allow the forces of one of the largest groups of the Iraqi opposition - the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, SCIRI, based on its territory - to cross the Iranian-Iraqi border. Meanwhile, the SCIRI is not in a hurry to intervene in the conflict despite the reports that its military units are stationing in Iran. SCIRI leader Baker al-Haqim has ordered his armed formations /their strength varies from 10,000 to 50,000 men, according to different estimations/ to maintain neutrality.

Before the war Washington asked Iran through unofficial channels to alter rhetoric from negative neutral to positive neutral. Nothing has come out of it.

In the course of the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the

Iranian authorities helped Washington by actively standing on the sidelines, not objecting against the dethroning of the Taliban and voicing readiness to help in the rehabilitation of Afghanistan. Then, American politicians firmly said that Teheran had given a constructive help in the antiterrorist campaign and the media began to talk of a possible warming of relations between Washington and Teheran. The honeymoon did not last long. US President George W. Bush included Iran in the "axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea, thus merely framing Iranian President Hatami, who initiated the rapprochement.

Teheran has not forgotten this "gratitude" and now its "active neutrality" is obviously in disfavor of the United States.

The deposing of the Saddam Hussein regime by the American hands is in Iran's interests: in this way it can easily get rid of a strong rival in the region, a rival which caused so many problems in the

past.

However, Teheran fears that the United States will stay in the region for a long time and be able to put its man in Baghdad. Iran wouldn't like to be surrounded by pro-American regimes, Karzai in Kabul to be complemented by his likelihood in Baghdad.

After the deposing of Saddam, something the Americans and Britons are after, nothing will prevent Teheran from abandoning neutrality. Moreover, it will have to do so in order to take an active part in the post-war political life in Iraq, including the protection of rights of Iraqi Shiites. Iran will not have to come into open confrontation with the United States.

To back the liberation guerilla movement in Iraq will be enough. It is with good reason that the Iranian leadership and leaders of the Iraqi opposition are already warning the United States and Britain that they should not stay in Iraq for long.

## Saddam asked Indian scientist to build nuke

AFP, New Delhi

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein approached a leading Indian nuclear scientist to help Baghdad build a nuclear bomb in 1978, a report said Sunday.

The offer was made to Raja Ramanna, a scientist and the then junior minister for defence, who was in the Iraqi capital for a week as Saddam's personal guest, the Hindustan Times said, quoting from a new book 'Saddam's Bomb' written by two British journalists.

The scientist was given a tour of Iraq's main nuclear facility at Tuwaitha and afterwards Saddam invited him to his office.

"You have done enough for your country," Saddam said, according to the book.

"Don't go back. Stay here and take over our nuclear programme. I will pay you whatever you want," Hussein told Ramanna.



PHOTO: AFP

US marines wear gas masks while continuing with their daily activities after a gas alarm sounded in the Fox Company camp close to the Euphrates River on the southern edge of the city of Nasiriyah, southern Iraq on Sunday. A US marine was struck by a vehicle and killed during clash with Iraqi forces and another has died in a separate drowning accident, US military officials said.