

Undercovered #33

More war stories from the world press.

Recent articles in the usually restrained *N.Y. Review of Books* characterized U.S. coverage of the Iraq war as “disgusting” and “cravenly submissive to the Pentagon and the White House.” Many reporters in Iraq were handicapped by embeddedness and/or a lack of Arabic and knowledge of the Middle East. CNN fielded two reporting teams, one for American audiences, another, harder-hitting team broadcasting to international audiences. Former Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, “You couldn’t hire actors to do as good a job as the press has done.”



Jessica Lynch

BBC gave an alternative version of the rescue of Private Jessica Lynch from Nasiriya hospital. Nasiriya doctors say Iraqi soldiers had left the hospital days before, and local people report that the American rescuers knew this. Still, they came at night with helicopters. “They cried ‘Go! Go! Go!’,” the doctors remember, “with guns and blanks and the sound of explosions. They made a show, like Sylvester Stallone and Jackie Chan, with jumping and shouting, breaking down doors — while night-vision cameras rolled. They handcuffed doctors and a patient with an abdominal wound. They sliced open Lynch’s special bed, stuffed with sand to prevent bedsores — the only one in the hospital — and carried Lynch to the helicopter. Iraqi doctors recall that in a hospital filled with war-wounded, they had given Lynch one of two nurses on the floor, donated their own blood because there wasn’t any, comforted and befriended her, and found special food for her. They tried once to take her to the Americans, but as their ambulance approached the U.S. checkpoint, American soldiers opened fire and the ambulance retreated. Lynch does not remember anything that happened (*Guardian, Toronto Star*).

The recently approved Iraq War Supplemental Appropriations Act requires the U.S. to pay “assistance” to relatives of dead and wounded Iraqi civilians, but the U.S. military finds casualties “not worth trying to characterize by numbers” (*Guardian*). Iraq Body Count estimates 4,065 to 5,223 deaths so far. Hospital records document up to 2,100 dead and 8,000 wounded in Baghdad (www.iraqbodycount.org, *L.A. Times*). The Pentagon admits one civilian death from cluster bombs, while Iraq Body Count numbers 200 to 372, with new casualties still occurring, many of them children attracted by bomblets lying in Iraq’s streets and gardens. Although U.S. troops have cleared 600, many thousands remain. Cluster bombs and other U.S. weapons figure in a Belgian lawsuit filed by 17 Iraqi and two Jordanian civilians accusing U.S. commander Tommy Franks and a Marine colonel of war crimes for using “ammunition that causes severe

suffering and injury in areas with a civilian population” (*S.F. Chronicle*).

Doctors at a Baghdad mental hospital said U.S. tanks knocked down their walls and did nothing as the hospital was looted. Only one patient, an insane killer, remains. “I hate the world and the world hates me,” he explained (*Harper’s Weekly Review*).

The World Health Organization warns of an imminent cholera outbreak in southern Iraq, where many people still lack safe drinking water (*Guardian*). U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization fears the collapse of Iraqi agriculture and widespread hunger. Although grains are ripe, harvest and storage systems have broken down. Looters have raided government warehouses of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, just when farmers must plant summer crops. Poultry feed, livestock medicines, and veterinary clinics have also been looted, and livestock raising is in jeopardy (*Observer*).

Christian Science Monitor reporters visited Baghdad with a geiger counter, getting readings of up to 1,900 times background levels from U.S. depleted uranium weapons. Reporters encountered children playing on burned-out tanks with DU bullets, a woman selling vegetables nearby, bullets littering the ground near the residence of U.S. and British officials reconstructing Iraq, and only one warning sign. According to Michael Sigmon, U.S. army surgeon, children playing with spent tank shells “would have to eat them and practically choke on DU residue to cause harm.” The U.N. Environmental Program has asked to do DU field tests in Iraq. Washington Congressman Jim McDermott, a doctor who has visited Iraq, states “science and common sense dictate it is unwise to use a weapon that distributes large quantities of a toxic waste in areas where people live, work, grow food, or draw water.” He has introduced HR1483, a bill requiring health and environmental studies, and clean up of DU contamination in the U.S. (<http://thomas.loc.gov>) The bill’s 14 co-sponsors include Congressman Peter DeFazio.

Since early April, seven Iraq nuclear sites have been raided and damaged by looters. Technical papers, equipment, and radioactive materials may be gone. U.S. forces left sites unprotected and/or sparsely protected. U.N. nuclear inspectors have asked to inspect the facilities, with no answer from the U.S. (*Washington Post*). Iraqi scientists say partially enriched uranium from one site is missing. “I saw empty uranium-oxide barrels lying around,” said a scientist. “We saw people using them for milking cows and carrying drinking water” (*Harper’s Weekly Review*).

President Bush has asked Congress to fund nuclear bunker buster bombs and to repeal a ban on research and development of “mini-nukes,” low-yield nuclear weapons. Senators Smith and Wyden are expected to vote on these two provisions of the defense authorization bill.

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