

[IRAQ]

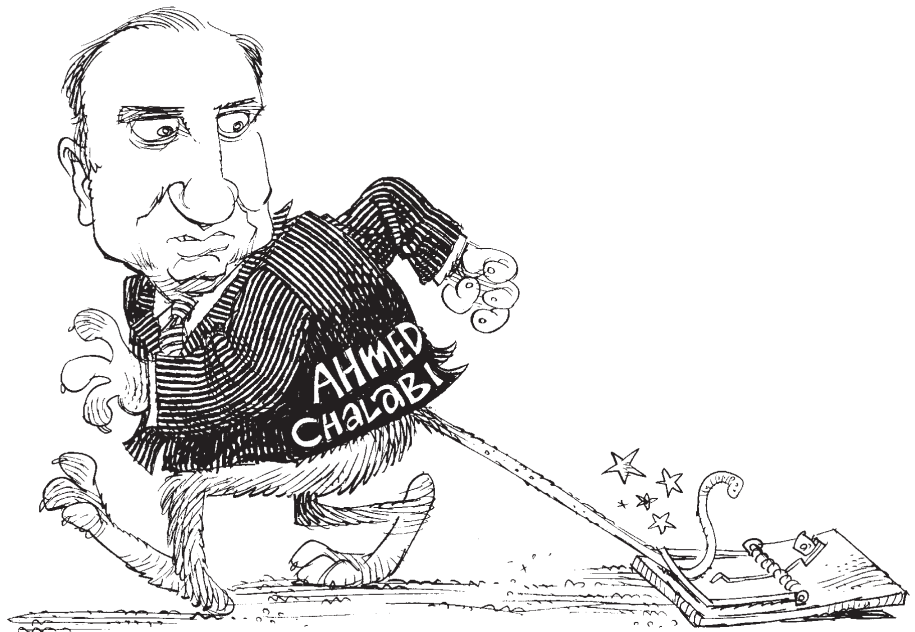
BENEDICT BLEEPING ARNOLD, PERHAPS

Pace, David Frum, but Ahmed Chalabi is no “James bleeping Madison.” Far from building a country, on his word we leveled one—and paid him over \$33 million for the privilege.

Just five months ago, the self-described “hero in error” was watching the State of the Union as a guest of First Lady Laura Bush. Now comes word that Iraqi police, accompanied by U.S. soldiers, have raided his home, seizing computers and files.

This isn’t the first cloud to pass over the Pentagon’s pick to run postwar Iraq. Chalabi, who hadn’t lived in Iraq since childhood, was convicted in Jordan of embezzling \$22 million and his weapons “intelligence” has proved an elaborate farce. Yet we escorted him into Baghdad, put him in charge of the new Finance Ministry, and until recently paid \$340,000 per month for his questionable services.

With *Newsweek* reporting that “Chalabi and his entourage told Iranian contacts about American political plans in Iraq” and with word out that the leaked documents came from Doug Feith’s office, this would seem a good time for the neocons to reconsider their taste in friends. But so far they seem unburdened by fact or sound strategy. *National Review Online* published a piece by Michael Rubin slamming “inside-the-beltway rumor mongering [that makes] clear the irrational contempt and ignorance that many professional pundits feel for any proponent of Arab democracy.” He defends Chalabi—or tries, insofar as “he has never kissed the hand of Saddam Hussein” might be considered a defense—and attacks Paul Bremer, who authorized the raid, for “playing the politics of personal vendetta.” Ditto neocon darling Laurie Mylroie, who condemns the “outrageous, and totally uncalled for, raid” and asks



her first good question, “Just what is the U.S. doing in Iraq?” For his part, Chalabi maintains that he is still “America’s best friend in Iraq”—which may mean that we’re in deeper trouble than we realize.

[POLITICS]

FOXMAN VS. FRITZ

In a *Charleston Post and Courier* op-ed that was unusually pointed for sitting senator, Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) parsed the reasons given for George W. Bush’s loopy decision to invade Iraq. One by one Hollings went over them—the so-called al-Qaeda tie, Baghdad’s nuclear weapons program, the idea that Iraqis would welcome American troops with open arms. None hold up under scrutiny, and Hollings now wonders if Bush and Co. really believed their own case for war. But there is one reason, Hollings observed, that does make sense—both for domestic political reasons and in neocon strategic terms: invade Iraq in order to remake the Middle East for Israel’s benefit.

The domestic political plus for George Bush was confirmed by the rapturous reception he received at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee’s annual Washington conference in mid-May. (The president’s boilerplate speech was interrupted 67 times by standing ovations.) Democratic strategists mope off the record that Bush’s real target is not

Jewish voters—a comparatively small number—but Jewish donors, who make up an estimated 50-70 percent of the Democratic Party’s large contributors. If Bush can partially neutralize them by catering to Ariel Sharon’s wishes, the Democratic Party would be in sorry competitive shape.

The Mideast strategic gambit is less concrete, but the basic idea is that if the U.S. would establish an Iraqi regime that made peace with Israel on Sharon’s terms—a neocon fantasy that Ahmed Chalabi successfully exploited in his many years inside the Beltway—how would Israel not be delighted?

Hollings’s exercise in political analysis caused an instant uproar. The ADL’s Abe Foxman demanded that the senator “disavow” his remarks. Why on earth should he? There may be something incorrect or unbalanced in Hollings’s analysis—but if so, let Foxman point it out and criticize it rather than flinging around discussion-ending accusations about “age-old anti-Semitic canards.” Free speech should be the American way, especially about an issue as important as the Iraq disaster.

[ECONOMICS]

DON’T BANK ON IT

To a businessman’s ears, offshoring customer-service call centers may seem like sweet music. But to customers it sounds

more like a cacophony of mangled English delivered in Punjabi accents. So reports a British industry analyst, ContactBabel, which found that every seventh customer who called an offshore service center was so dissatisfied that he took his business elsewhere. According to ContactBabel, British banks might save £9.26 million a year by outsourcing 1,000 call-center jobs to India. But that savings would be wiped out if just 0.343 percent of customers switched to another bank as a result. In fact, last year, 1.09 percent of British bank customers did just that, according to *Direct Marketing Bulletin*, making offshoring a money-losing proposition.

[BELTWAY]

EX-FRIENDS

Some Beltway conservatives believe that President Bush's base will remain enthusiastic despite the deteriorating situation in Iraq and the administration's budgetary profligacy. But a recent Zogby poll found that nearly one Republican voter in five hasn't yet committed to supporting the president's re-election

Robert Novak claimed in his syndicated column that Donald Devine, a veteran activist and vice chairman of the American Conservative Union, is such a Republican. While some swooned at Bush's keynote address to the ACU's 40th anniversary dinner, Devine reportedly was not impressed.

This revelation elicited an angry letter from ACU chairman David Keene, who demanded Devine's resignation. "I found it offensive," Keene lectured, "and no longer consider you either a personal friend or a friend of ACU."

Devine disputed elements of Novak's story, saying that he did not refuse to shake the president's hand or to applaud at the ACU dinner, and wrote Bush an apologetic letter. But he has published a number of articles on his organization's website honestly assessing shortcom-

ings of the administration's record on spending, war, and immigration. The conservative movement would profit from more principled nonpartisan analysis and less mindless Republican cheerleading and presidential hero-worship.

[SOCIETY]

WHAT CULTURE WAR?

When it comes to the war in Iraq, Max Boot—formerly of the *Wall Street Journal*, now a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations—is a hawk and an optimist. But Boot recently made it known in the pages of the *Los Angeles Times* that he can be a dove, too—at least as far as the culture war is concerned. Planting democracy in the sandy soil of Iraq is a piece of cake; not so, however, preventing gay marriage from becoming the law of the land in the United States itself. Opponents of same-sex marriages, writes Boot, "argue ... that we shouldn't tamper with thousands of years of tradition But 141 years ago we tampered with an equally old tradition: slavery." Other arguments against gay marriage, on moral, religious, or sociological grounds, are just as ineffectual by Boot's reckoning. So, he says, "Republicans would be wise not to expend too much political capital" on this issue. "They will only make themselves look 'intolerant' to soccer moms ..."

There are two problems with Boot's position. One, of course, is its easy acceptance of same-sex marriage—and it is marriage that Boot is talking about; civil unions will not cut it for him. The other and, really, equally serious problem is the willingness to forgo an important political debate simply so that the Republican Party can avoid looking intolerant. A country that cannot have an honest debate over as important an institution as marriage is in serious trouble. Tell us, Max, shouldn't the United States have a little democracy, as well as the Middle East? ■

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Ralph Nader: Conservatively Speaking

The long-time progressive makes a pitch for the disenfranchised Right.

Ralph Nader recently accepted Pat Buchanan's invitation to sit down with us and explain why his third-party presidential bid ought to appeal to conservatives disaffected with George W. Bush. We think readers will be interested in the reflections of a man who has been a major figure in American public life for 40 years—and who now finds himself that rarest of birds, a conviction politician.

PAT BUCHANAN: Let me start off with foreign policy—Iraq and the Middle East. You have seen the polls indicating widespread contempt for the United States abroad. Why do they hate us?

RALPH NADER: First of all, we have been supporting despots, dictators, and oligarchs in all those states for a variety of purposes. We supported Saddam Hussein. He was our anti-Communist dictator until 1990. It's also cultural; they see corporate culture as abandoning the restraints on personal behavior dictated by their religion and culture. Our corporate pornography and anything-goes values are profoundly offensive to them.

The other thing is that we are supporting the Israeli military regime with billions of dollars and ignoring both the Israeli peace movement, which is very substantial, and the Palestinian peace movement. They see a nuclear-armed Israel that could wipe out the Middle East in a weekend if it wanted to.

They think that we are on their backs, in their house, undermining their desire to overthrow their own tyrants.

PB: Then you would say it is not only

Bush who is at fault, but Clinton and Bush and Reagan, all the way back?

RN: The subservience of our congressional and White House puppets to Israeli military policy has been consistent. Until '91, any dictator who was anti-Communist was our ally.

PB: You used the term “congressional puppets.” Did John Kerry show himself to be a congressional puppet when he voted to give the president a blank check to go to war?

RN: They're almost all puppets. There are two sets: Congressional puppets and White House puppets. When the chief puppeteer comes to Washington, the puppets prance.

PB: Why do both sets of puppets, support the Sharon/Likud policies in the Middle East rather than the peace movement candidates and leaders in Israel?

RN: That is a good question because the peace movement is broad indeed. They just put 120,000 people in a square in Tel Aviv. They are composed of former government ministers, existing and former members of the Knesset, former generals, former combat veterans, former heads of internal security, people from all backgrounds. It is not any fringe movement.

The answer to your question is that instead of focusing on how to bring a peaceful settlement, both parties concede their independent judgment to the pro-Israeli lobbies in this country because they perceive them as determining the margin in some state elections and as sources of funding. They

don't appear to agree with Tom Friedman, who wrote that memorable phrase, “Ariel Sharon has Arafat under house arrest in Ramallah and Bush under house arrest in the Oval Office.”

Virtually no member of Congress can say that, and so we come to this paradoxical conclusion that there is far more freedom in Israel to discuss this than there is in the United States, which is providing billions of dollars in economic and military assistance.

PB: Let me move on to Iraq. You were opposed to the war, and it now appears that it has become sort of a bloody stalemate. You said you would bring troops out of Iraq within six months. What if the country collapses and becomes a haven for terrorists? Would you send American troops back in to clean it up?

RN: Under my proposal there would be an international peacekeeping force, and the withdrawal would be a smart withdrawal during which there are internationally supervised elections. We would have both military and corporate withdrawal because the Iraqi people see the corporations are beginning to take over their economy, including their oil resources. And we would continue humanitarian assistance until the Iraqi people get on their feet. We would bring to the forefront during the election autonomies for Kurds, Sunnis, and Shi'ites. So this would not be like a withdrawal in Vietnam where we just barely got out with the helicopters.

TAC: You often mention corporations. What is the theory behind this or what