

# Reality TV News

Scripted by the Bush Administration

by Justin Raimondo

From pro-war to antiwar, from uncritical acceptance of government pronouncements to principled skepticism, the American media's perspective on the war has veered drunkenly from one extreme to another. They not only trumpeted the lies put forth by the War Party but gave them credulous and even solemn attention, then turned on a dime and desecrated the deception—as if they had no responsibility in the matter.

They made our bed, however, and now we are all sleeping in it. As the *New York Times* editorializes against the neo-imperialist inanities that seduced us into war, they conveniently forget that their star reporter, Judith Miller, acted as a transmission belt for government lies. The *Times* consistently retailed the fables proffered by Iraqi exiles and presented the imaginative effusions of the Office of Special Plans—a Pentagon propaganda group described by Seymour Hersh as a “cabal”—as fact, while dissent on Iraq's WMD capacity was ignored or downplayed. The rest of the media followed suit. As administration officials raised the specter of a nuclear-armed Saddam — “We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud,” Condoleezza Rice famously averred—the media, for the most part, reported all of this uncritically. In the meantime, however, there was a rebellion inside the intelligence community, with the career officers rising up against the political appointees—neocons with an agenda—who objected to the politicization of intelligence-gathering. As Michael Massing notes in the *New York Review of Books*:

A survey of the coverage in November, December, and January [2002-03] reveals relatively few articles about the debate inside the intelligence community. Those articles that did run tended to appear on the inside pages. Most investigative energy was directed at stories that supported, rather than challenged, the administration's case.

In the fall of 2002, it was clear that the U.N. inspection teams had dismantled Iraq's embryonic nuclear program; the American public never learned this crucial fact, however. Instead, it was regularly treated to a series of fabrications thrown together by Pentagon propagandists and treated as unassailable fact by the major media. David Kay, who was making the rounds of the talk shows—and had yet to admit to the mendacity of the WMD myth—was faithfully echoing the administration's line and was rewarded with plenty of airtime. On the other hand, Scott Ritter, the former U.N. arms inspector, who was saying that Iraq had been effectively disarmed after Gulf War I—and, as it turned out, was completely and utterly correct—was rel-

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egated to “alternative” media and appearances at college campuses and before peace groups.

In the atmosphere of war hysteria generated by the Bush administration, the media was far more interested in the dubious fantasies promoted by Iraqi exile leader Ahmed Chalabi, a convicted embezzler, than in anything remotely resembling the truth. Now that we have marched into Iraq and uncovered exactly zero WMD's, the liar Chalabi revels in his capacity to fool those stupid Americans: “We are heroes in error,” he told the London *Telegraph*. “As far as we're concerned we've been entirely successful. That tyrant Saddam is gone and the Americans are in Baghdad. What was said before is not important. The Bush administration is looking for a scapegoat. We're ready to fall on our swords if he wants.”

On the subject of Saddam's alleged links to Al Qaeda and his purported assistance to the cabal that pulled off the September 11 terrorist attacks, the record is depressingly similar to the charade over WMD's. The Bush administration eagerly promoted the nutball theories of Laurie Mylroie—apparently a favorite of Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz—even after they had been thoroughly and repeatedly debunked. According to Mylroie—who is taken seriously enough to have been asked to testify before the September 11 Commission—Saddam not only pulled off September 11 but was responsible for the 1993 bombing at the World Trade Center and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. If she suddenly announced that Iraq had caused the 1906 California earthquake, no one in her neoconservative fan club would even blink. Wolfowitz and war profiteer Richard Perle both blurbed her books, which were published and promoted by the American Enterprise Institute.

If the picture the administration was painting of Iraq as a terrorist nest was a little vague and short on details, none of this mattered to the major media, who simply reported it uncritically. From the neocon perspective, the dubious quality of the information received is proof of its veracity: “*Intelligence about terrorism is murky*,” said Paul Wolfowitz on Fox News. “I think the lesson of 9/11 is that, if you're not prepared to act on the basis of murky intelligence, then you're going to have to act after the fact. And after the fact now means after horrendous things have happened to this country.” Translation: *So what if we're lying? If you don't believe us, you're taking a chance of being killed.*

Within hours of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the War Party had their lies cocked, locked, and ready to rock—at least according to former counterterrorism “czar” Richard Clarke and a report on CBS last fall. The neo-conservatives came to Washington in the winter of 2001 with their agenda prepackaged and ready to be consumed: By the time the fall of that fateful year rolled around, the President of the United States was ready to swallow whatever they dished

out.

And so was the “liberal” media. The smoke had hardly cleared from lower Manhattan when already 44 percent of the American people had been led to believe that Saddam was the principal culprit. Surely they did not jump to such an egregiously erroneous conclusion through a process of divination: The administration and its willing accomplices in the media did their level best to fix the Big Lie in the American consciousness.

Perhaps the biggest lie of all was the smear campaign conducted by the War Party against anyone who questioned the wisdom of attacking and occupying Iraq. The most massive antiwar movement in world history was smeared as both an Islamic conspiracy and a communist front. Newscasters wore “patriotic” lapel pins as they broadcast news of American bombs raining down on newly “liberated” Iraqis. Reading government press releases practically verbatim to its fear-deadened and thoroughly manipulated audience, Fox News turned itself into the 21st-century equivalent of a Soviet-era state-run media outlet, the Pravda of the War Party, brazenly propagandistic to the point of self-parody.

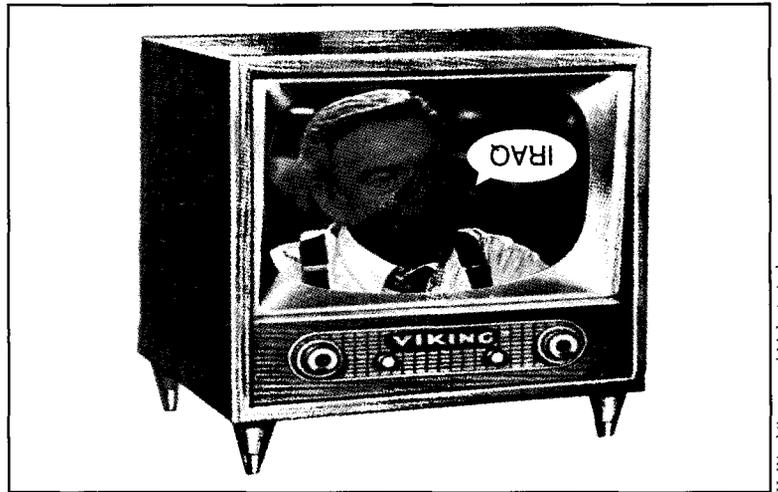
In order to get even a semblance of what was—and is—going on in the Middle East, and what their own government was up to, Americans had to turn to the foreign media, but the distorting effects of war hysteria were all too apparent there as well—especially the penumbra of prevarication emanating from the Murdoch media empire and the domain of Lord Black. The London *Telegraph*, for example, was forever finding papers in the ruins of Baghdad—which they just happened to come across, you understand—that “proved” all sorts of untruths: for example, that George Galloway had received payments from the Iraqi government and that Muhammad Atta had met with an Iraqi agent at the Prague airport. Both documents proved to be forgeries: Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenberg, writing in *Newsweek*, reported that the “evidence” of the Prague connection trumpeted by the *Telegraph* was “probably a fabrication.” About the Galloway papers, there was no doubt at all: The smeared former British MP was awarded a substantial libel judgment, but the Labour Party, which had promptly expelled him the moment the charges were leveled, somehow did not feel obligated to restore his membership.

Forgery seems to be one of the War Party’s favorite tactics, as George W. Bush discovered to his great chagrin when someone talked him into including the infamous 16 words in his State of the Union Address that alluded to Iraq’s alleged efforts to procure uranium from “an African nation.” That nation, it turned out, was Niger, and the President’s certainty sprang from his belief that the CIA had the documents ostensibly proving that Saddam had made such an effort. These, too, turned out to be forgeries—and not very good ones, at that.

A grand jury empaneled in Washington, D.C., is currently looking into the Niger uranium forgeries, although we have heard next to nothing about it in the media, except for a few paragraphs buried near the end of stories about *l’affaire Plame*. The outing of a CIA agent by someone in or close to the White House is another story that the media is hardly making any effort to investigate. When former ambassador Joseph C. Wilson went public with the true story of Saddam’s nonexistent Niger adventure—he had personally investigated the matter and reported back to the CIA that the charges were bogus—his wife, Valerie Plame, a CIA agent, was “outed” by vengeful neocons out to punish them both. A grand jury is investigating that,

too—but we do not hear much about that, either.

We do not hear about a lot of things. For example, in the run-up to war, the antiwar movement was examined under a media microscope, and the old practice of red-baiting was suddenly in vogue. It was almost enough to make me feel young again. *L.A. Weekly*, *Salon*, and, of course, professional neocon character assassins such as David Horowitz and David Frum, went over the political résumés of the antiwar opposition with a fine-toothed comb. Somehow, the War Party escaped similar scrutiny.



H. Ward Street and Melanie Anderson

So, the media was servile, lazy, arrogant, and slavishly dependent on government handouts and sources in reporting the Iraq war: I’m shocked—*shocked*, I tell you! You mean there’s gambling in this casino? Why should the media be any less decadent and indifferent to truth than their thoroughly degraded audience, whose inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy is exemplified by the success of the “reality show” genre, which first became popular—where else?—on Fox. c

## On the Way to Inverness

by Peter Hunt

Small flocks of grazing black-faced sheep below  
The ancient mountain-pass, blue haze of sky—  
Row-boats rocking in their emerald castles  
To the sad Highland song across the loch,  
Silver flash of fish, sweet heather smell,  
Lapping foam beyond the sea’s fierce roar:  
A haunted peace hard-won from bitter war.