

## What I heard about Iraq in 2005

By [Eliot Weinberger](#)

Global Research, December 30, 2005

London Review of Books 30 December 2005

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

In 2005 I heard that Coalition forces were camped in the ruins of Babylon. I heard that bulldozers had dug trenches through the site and cleared areas for helicopter landing pads and parking lots, that thousands of sandbags had been filled with dirt and archaeological fragments, that a 2600-year-old brick pavement had been crushed by tanks, and that the moulded bricks of dragons had been gouged out from the Ishtar Gate by soldiers collecting souvenirs. I heard that the ruins of the Sumerian cities of Umma, Umm al-Akareb, Larsa and Tello were completely destroyed and were now landscapes of craters.

I heard that the US was planning an embassy in Baghdad that would cost \$1.5 billion, as expensive as the Freedom Tower at Ground Zero, the proposed tallest building in the world.

I saw a headline in the *Los Angeles Times* that read: 'After Levelling City, US Tries to Build Trust.'

I heard that military personnel were now carrying 'talking point' cards with phrases such as: 'We are a values-based, people-focused team that strives to uphold the dignity and respect of all.'

I heard that 47 per cent of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein helped plan 9/11 and 44 per cent believed that the hijackers were Iraqi; 61 per cent thought that Saddam had been a serious threat to the US and 76 per cent said the Iraqis were now better off.

I heard that Iraq was now ranked with Haiti and Senegal as one of the poorest nations on earth. I heard the United Nations Human Rights Commission report that acute malnutrition among Iraqi children had doubled since the war began. I heard that only 5 per cent of the money Congress had allocated for reconstruction had actually been spent. I heard that in Fallujah people were living in tents pitched on the ruins of their houses.

I heard that this year's budget included \$105 billion for the War on Terror, which would bring the total to \$300 billion. I heard that Halliburton was estimating that its bill for providing services to US troops in Iraq would exceed \$10 billion. I heard that the family of an American soldier killed in Iraq receives \$12,000.

I heard that the White House had deleted the chapter on Iraq from the annual Economic Report of the President, on the grounds that it did not conform with an otherwise cheerful tone.

Within a week in January I heard Condoleezza Rice say there were 120,000 Iraqi troops trained to take over the security of the country; I heard Senator Joseph Biden, Democrat from Delaware, say that the number was closer to 4000; I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'The fact of the matter is that there are 130,200 who have been trained and equipped. That's a

fact. The idea that that number's wrong is just not correct. The number is right.'

I heard him explain the discrepancy: 'Now, are some getting killed every day? Sure. Are some retiring at various times or injured? Yes, they're gone.' I remembered that a year before he had said the number was 210,000. I heard the Pentagon announce it would no longer release Iraqi troop figures.

I heard that 50,000 US soldiers in Iraq did not have body armour, because the army's equipment manager had placed it at the same priority level as socks. I heard that soldiers were buying their own flak jackets with steel 'trauma' plates, Camelbak water pouches, ballistic goggles, knee and elbow pads, drop pouches to hold ammunition magazines, and load-bearing vests. I heard they were rigging their vehicles with pieces of scrap metal as protection against roadside bombs, since the production of armoured Humvees had fallen more than a year behind schedule and the few available armoured vehicles were mainly reserved for officers and visiting dignitaries.

I heard that the private security firm Custer Battles had been paid \$15 million to provide security for civilian flights at Baghdad airport at a time when no planes were flying. I heard that US forces were still unable to secure the two-mile highway from the airport to the Green Zone.

I heard that the President's uncle, Bucky Bush, had made half a million dollars cashing in his stock options in Engineered Support Systems Inc, a defence contractor that had received \$100 million for work in Iraq. Bucky Bush is on the board of directors. I heard Dan Kreher, vice-president of investor relations for ESSI, say: 'The fact his nephew is in the White House has absolutely nothing to do with Mr Bush being on our board or with our stock having gone up 1000 per cent in the past five years.'

I heard that a Pentagon audit of only some of the Halliburton contracts had found \$212 million in 'questionable costs'. I heard that eight other government audits of Halliburton were marked 'classified' and not released to the public.

I heard that African-Americans normally form 23 per cent of active-duty troops, but that recruitment of African-Americans had fallen by 41 per cent since 2000. I heard that a US Military Image Study prepared for the army had recommended that, 'for the army to achieve its mission goals with Future Force Soldiers, it must overhaul its image as well as its product offering.'

I heard that the military was developing robot soldiers. I heard Gordon Johnson of the Joint Forces Command at the Pentagon say: 'They don't get hungry. They're not afraid. They don't forget their orders. They don't care if the guy next to them has just been shot.' I heard him say: 'I have been asked what happens if the robot destroys a school bus rather than a tank parked nearby. The lawyers tell me there are no prohibitions against robots making life-or-death decisions. We will not entrust a robot with that decision until we are confident they can make it.'

\*

In March, on the second anniversary of the invasion, I heard that 1511 US soldiers had been killed and approximately 11,000 wounded. There was no way of knowing exactly how many Iraqis had died.

I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'Well, if you have a country of 25 million people and you have x thousands of criminals, terrorists, Baathists, former regime elements who want to blow up things and make bombs and kill people, they can still do that. That happens in most major cities in the world, most countries in the world, that people get killed and there's violence.'

I heard that, along with banning photographs of the caskets of American soldiers, the administration was actively preventing photographs being taken of the wounded, who were flown in from Iraq late at night, transferred to military hospitals in unmarked vans, and unloaded at back entrances.

I heard about despair. I heard General John Abizaid, commander of US Central Command, say of the insurgents: 'I don't think that they're growing. I think that they're desperate.'

I heard about hope. I heard General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, say: 'I came away more positive than I've ever been. I think we're getting some momentum built up.'

I heard about happiness. I heard Lieutenant General James Mattis say that 'it's a lot of fun to fight' in Iraq. I heard him say: 'You know, it's a hell of a hoot. I like brawling.'

I heard that Donald Rumsfeld had created his own intelligence agency, the Strategic Support Branch, 'designed to operate without detection and under the defense secretary's direct control', without the oversight laws that apply to the CIA, and that it was employing 'notorious figures' whose 'links to the US government would be embarrassing if disclosed'. I heard about the practice of 'extraordinary rendition', by which suspected terrorists are kidnapped and flown to countries known to torture prisoners, or to secret US prisons in Thailand, Afghanistan, Poland and Romania.

I heard that there were 3200 prisoners in Abu Ghraib, 700 more than its capacity. I heard Major General William Brandenburg, who oversees US military detention operations in Iraq, say: 'We've got a normal capacity and a surge capacity. We're operating at surge capacity.' A year before, I had heard the President promise 'to demolish the Abu Ghraib prison, as a fitting symbol of Iraq's new beginning'. I heard that outside the prison there is a sign that reads: 'No Parking. Detainee Drop Off Zone.'

I heard that some American soldiers had made a heavy metal music video called 'Ramadi Madness', with sections entitled 'Those Crafty Little Bastards' and 'Another Day, Another Mission, Another Scumbag'. In one scene, a soldier kicks the face of an Iraqi who is bound and lying on the ground, dying. In another, a soldier moves the arm of a man who has just been shot dead, to make it appear that he is waving. I heard a Pentagon spokesman say: 'Clearly, the soldiers probably exercised poor judgment.'

I heard that the army released a 1200-page report detailing the torture of Iraqi prisoners at a single military intelligence base during a few months in 2003. In response to the report, I heard Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Martin say: 'The army's a learning organisation. If we have some shortfalls, we try to correct them. We've learned how to do that process now.'

I heard a US soldier talk about his photographs of the 12 prisoners he had shot with a machine-gun: 'I shot this guy in the face. See, his head is split open. I shot this guy in the groin. He took three days to bleed to death.' I heard him say he was a devout Christian: 'Well, I knelt down. I said a prayer, stood up, and gunned them all down.'

\*

In April I heard General Richard Myers say: 'I think we're winning. OK? I think we're definitely winning. I think we've been winning for some time.'

I heard Major General William Webster, commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, say: 'We think the insurgency is weakening over time. Some of these attacks appear to be very spectacular and well co-ordinated, but, in fact, are not.'

I heard Lieutenant General James Conroy of the marines say that American troop withdrawals would soon begin, because 'Iraqis are starting to take care of their own situation.' I heard Rear Admiral William Sullivan report to Congress that there were 145,000 'combat-capable' Iraqi forces. I heard Sabah Hadum, a spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, say: 'We are paying about 135,000, but that does not necessarily mean that 135,000 are actually working.' I heard that as many as 50,000 may be 'ghost soldiers' - invented names whose pay is collected by officers or bureaucrats.

I heard Staff Sergeant Craig Patrick, who was training Iraqi troops, say: 'It's all about perception, to convince the American public that everything is going as planned and we're right on schedule to be out of here. I mean, they can bullshit the American people, but they can't bullshit us.'

As many countries pulled their small numbers of troops out of Iraq, I heard the State Department announce it would no longer use the phrase 'Coalition of the Willing'.

I heard that of the 40 water and sewage systems in Iraq, 'not one is being operated properly.' I heard that of the 19 power plants that had been rebuilt by the US, none works correctly. I heard a US official blame this on the 'indifferent work ethic' of Iraqis.

I read, in the *New York Times*, that thanks to the 'sustained momentum' of the 'military operation', the 'administration's goal of turning Iraq over to a permanent, elected Iraqi government' was 'within striking distance'. I heard General Richard Myers say: 'We're on track.' And I heard Major General Adnan Thabit say: 'We are gaining more victories because people are now co-operating more with us.'

I heard General John Abizaid predict that Iraqi security forces would be leading the fight against the insurgents in most of the country by the end of 2005. I heard General George Casey, commander of the Multinational Forces in Iraq, say: 'We should be able to take some fairly substantial reductions in the size of our forces.'

I heard that the insurgents had been driven out of the cities and into the desert and that they were having trouble finding new recruits. I heard Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno say: 'They're slowly losing.'

I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'We don't have an exit strategy, we have a victory strategy.'

\*

A few weeks later, I heard Lawrence di Rita, a Pentagon spokesman, admit that 'there's been an uptick' in violence. I heard Pentagon officials dismiss this as 'desperate attacks by desperate individuals', but I heard General Richard Myers now say about the insurgents: 'I think their capacity stays about the same. And where they are right now is where they were

almost a year ago.'

I heard that a report by the CIA National Intelligence Council had stated that 'Iraq has now replaced Afghanistan as the training ground for the next generation of "professionalised" terrorists,' providing 'a recruitment ground and the opportunity for enhancing technical skills'. I heard that it said that Iraq was a more effective training ground than Afghanistan, because 'the urban nature of the war in Iraq was helping combatants learn how to carry out assassinations, kidnappings, car bombings and other kinds of attacks that were never a staple of the fighting in Afghanistan during the anti-Soviet campaigns of the 1980s.'

I heard that the State Department refused to release its annual report on terrorism, which would have shown that the number of 'significant' attacks outside Iraq had grown from 175 in 2003 to 655 in 2004. I heard Karen Aguilar, acting co-ordinator for counterterrorism at the State Department, explain that 'statistics are not relevant' to 'trends in global terrorism'.

I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'Goodness knows, it doesn't take a genius to blow up a building.'

I heard that in the month of April there were 67 suicide bombings. I heard Colonel Pat Lang, former chief of Mideast operations at the Defense Intelligence Agency, say: 'It's just political rhetoric to say we are not in a civil war. We've been in a civil war for a long time.'

I heard that 1600 US soldiers were dead. I heard that every week more than 200 Iraqis were dying in the suicide bombings.

I heard Condoleezza Rice, on a surprise visit to Iraq, say: 'We are so grateful that there are Americans willing to sacrifice so the Middle East will be whole and free and democratic and at peace.' On that same day, the bodies of 34 recently killed men were found in a mass grave; a high official in the Ministry of Industry was shot dead; a leading Shia cleric was shot dead; and the governor of Diyala province survived a suicide bombing, though four others in his entourage did not and 37 nearby were wounded.

I heard Donald Rumsfeld, asked whether we were winning or losing the war in Iraq, reply: 'Winning or losing is not the issue for "we", in my view, in the traditional, conventional context of using the words "winning" and "losing" in a war.'

I heard a truck driver named Muhammad say, 'With my own eyes I've seen the Americans, when their patrol was hit by a roadside bomb, open fire on all the civilian cars around them,' and another driver, from Fallujah, say: 'If Bush is a real man, he should walk down the street alone!'

I heard that the Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, has 3000 Kurdish peshmerga soldiers stationed around his house.

I heard the President proclaim a 'critical victory in the War on Terror' with the capture of Abu Faraj al-Libbi, whom the President said was a 'top general' and the number three man in al-Qaida. I heard him say: 'His arrest removes a dangerous enemy who was a direct threat to America and for those who love freedom.' A few days later, I heard that the man had probably been confused with someone else with a vaguely similar name. I heard that a former associate of Osama bin Laden in London had laughed and said: 'What I remember of him is that he used to make the coffee and do the photocopying.' I never heard this reported in the American press.

At the dedication of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, I heard the President compare his War on Terror with Lincoln's war against slavery.

I heard the President say that Iraqi forces now outnumber their American counterparts.

\*

In May I heard that there were three suicide bombings every day.

I heard a journalist ask the President: 'Do you think that the insurgency is getting harder now to defeat militarily?' And I heard the President reply: 'No, I don't think so. I think they're being defeated. And that's why they continue to fight.'

I heard a human rights worker say: 'In Baghdad today, four clerics (three Sunni and one Shia) were assassinated. The bodies of two other Sunni clerics who had been abducted last week were found. A suicide car bomber detonated his vehicle in the Abu Cher market killing nine Iraqi National Guard troops and injuring 28 civilians. Two engineering students were killed when a bomb (or rocket) struck their classroom at a local school. The dean of a high school in the Shaab neighborhood was assassinated. One judge, two officials from the Ministry of Defence and one official investigating corruption in the previous interim government were assassinated. In all, 31 dead, 42 injured and 17 abducted. Rumours abound in Baghdad about who is responsible for all the attacks but no one has claimed responsibility. And yet compared to some days in recent weeks here in Baghdad the number of dead and injured was fewer. So comparatively speaking it was a fairly quiet day here in Baghdad.'

I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'We don't do body counts.' But then I heard the Pentagon releasing body counts. It said 1600 insurgents had been killed last year in Fallujah, but then I heard that the marines had discovered 'few bodies' after the city was captured, and months later a 'martyrs' cemetery' was found to contain only 79 graves. I heard that the army had completely destroyed a 'guerrilla training camp' near Lake Tharthar, killing all 85 insurgents, and I heard the television news report that this was 'the single biggest one-day death toll for militants in months, and the latest in a series of blows to the insurgency'. But then I heard that some European journalists visited the camp the next day and the insurgents were still there. Then I heard US officials claim that the insurgents must have dragged away their own dead. But then I heard a reporter ask how all 85 dead insurgents could have dragged themselves away. And I heard Major Richard Goldenberg reply: 'We could spend years going back and forth on body counts. The important thing is the effect this has on the organised insurgency.'

I heard about despair. I heard Colonel Joseph DiSalvo, commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, say: 'What we're seeing is the terrorists are in desperation.' I heard him say: 'By the end of the summer, the terrorists will be captured, dead or, in the least, severely disrupted.'

I heard Dick Cheney say: 'The level of activity that we see today, from a military standpoint, I think, will clearly decline. I think they're in the last throes, if you will, of the insurgency.'

I heard Porter J. Goss, director of the CIA, say that the insurgents were 'not quite in the last throes, but I think they are very close to it.'

I heard Dick Cheney later explain: 'If you look at what the dictionary says about throes, it



can still be a violent period. When you look back at World War Two, the toughest battle, both in Europe and in the Pacific, occurred just a few months before the end. And I see this as a similar situation, where they're going to go all out.'

I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'Last throes could be a violent last throe, or a placid and calm last throe. Look it up in the dictionary.'

\*

I heard Senator Chuck Hagel, Republican from Nebraska, say: 'Things aren't getting better; they're getting worse. The White House is completely disconnected from reality. It's like they're just making it up as they go along. The reality is that we're losing in Iraq.'

I heard Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Wellman say of the insurgents: 'We can't kill them all. When I kill one, I create three.'

I heard that Congressman Walter Jones, Republican from North Carolina and the man who renamed French fries 'freedom fries', was now calling for the withdrawal of US troops. I heard him say: 'The American people are getting to a point here: how much more can we take?' I heard Congressman Mike Pence, Republican from Indiana, explain why he is opposed to a timetable for withdrawal: 'I never tell my kids when my patience is going to run out, because they'll usually try it.'

I heard Condoleezza Rice speak about a 'generational commitment' in Iraq.

I heard the President say: 'We have put the enemy on the run, and now they spend their days avoiding capture, because they know America's armed services are on their trail.'

I heard him tell the American people: 'As we work to deliver opportunity at home, we're also keeping you safe from threats from abroad. We went to war because we were attacked, and we are at war today because there are still people out there who want to harm our country and hurt our citizens. Our troops are fighting these terrorists in Iraq so you will not have to face them here at home.'

I heard the President say: 'See, in my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda.'

\*

I heard that US troops had killed the number two man in al-Qaida in Iraq. I heard that US troops had killed another man who was the number two in al-Qaida in Iraq. I heard that US troops had killed yet another man who was the number two in al-Qaida in Iraq.

I heard that in Baghdad 92 per cent of the people did not have stable electricity, 33 per cent did not have safe drinking water, and 25 per cent of children under the age of five were suffering from malnutrition. I heard that there were two or three car bombings a day, on some days killing a hundred people and wounding many hundreds more.

I heard General William Webster say: 'Certainly saying anything about "breaking the back" or "about to reach the end of the line" or those kinds of things do not apply to the insurgency at this point.'

I heard a 'high-ranking army officer' say: 'There's simply not enough forces here. There are not enough to do anything right; everybody's got their finger in the dyke.' I heard that the soldiers of Marine Company E had set up cardboard dummies of themselves to make it appear that they had more men in battle.

I heard the President say: 'I'd say I spend most of my time worrying about right now people losing their life in Iraq. Both Americans and Iraqis. I worry about my girls. I used to worry about my wife, until she hit an 85 per cent popularity figure. Now she's worried about me. You know, I don't worry all that much, other than what I just described to you. I attribute that to - I've got peace of mind. A lot of it has to do with my particular faith, and a lot of that has to do with the fact that a lot of people pray for me and Laura. I'm sleeping pretty good. Seriously. I get asked that. There's times when I hadn't been. I've got peace of mind.'

\*

In 2005 I heard about 2001. I heard that on 21 September 2001, the PDB (President's Daily Brief), prepared by the CIA, reported that there was no evidence that Saddam Hussein was connected to the September 11 attacks.

I heard Condoleezza Rice say: 'The fact of the matter is that when we were attacked on September 11, we had a choice to make. We could decide that the proximate cause was al-Qaida and the people who flew those planes into buildings and, therefore, we would go after al-Qaida. Or we could take a bolder approach.'

I heard Karl Rove say: 'Conservatives saw the savagery of 9/11 and the attacks and prepared for war. Liberals saw the savagery of the 9/11 attacks and wanted to prepare indictments and offer therapy and understanding for our attackers. Conservatives saw what happened to us on 9/11 and said we will defeat our enemies. Liberals saw what happened to us and said we must understand our enemies.'

In 2005 I heard about 2002. I heard that on 23 July 2002, eight months before the invasion, Sir Richard Dearlove, the head of MI6, reported in a secret memo to Tony Blair that he was told in Washington that the US was going to 'remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD'. However, because 'the case was thin, Saddam was not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran . . . the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.'

I heard that this 'Downing Street Memo' was a scandal in the British press, but I didn't hear it mentioned on American network television for two months. During those two months, ABC news had 121 stories on Michael Jackson and 42 stories on Natalee Holloway, a high-school student who disappeared from a bar while on holiday in Aruba. CBS news had 235 stories about Michael Jackson and 70 about Natalee Holloway.

I heard that in the second half of 2002, the US air force and the RAF dropped twice as many bombs on Iraq as they had done in all of 2001. I heard that the objective was to provoke Saddam into giving the allies an excuse for war.

I heard that the primary source of information about Saddam's mobile biological weapons labs and germ warfare capability, used by Colin Powell in his presentation at the United Nations and in the President's 2003 State of the Union address, was an Iraqi defector held by German intelligence. The Germans had repeatedly told the Americans that none of the



information supplied by this defector, an advanced alcoholic, was reliable. He had been given the code-name Curveball.

I heard that the primary source of information about the tons of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons buried under Saddam's private villas and under Saddam Hussein Hospital in Baghdad and throughout Iraq was a Kurdish exile called Adnan Ihsan Saeed al-Haideri. He was sponsored by the Rendon Group, a Washington public relations firm that had been paid hundreds of millions of dollars by the Pentagon to promote the war. (Rendon, among other things, had organised a group of Iraqi exiles in London, called them the Iraqi National Congress, and installed Ahmad Chalabi as their leader.) I heard that after al-Haideri failed a lie-detector test, administered by the CIA in Thailand, his stories were nevertheless leaked to journalists, most prominently Judith Miller of the *New York Times*, which published them on the front page.

I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'Well, you never know what's going to happen. I presented the President a list of about fifteen things that could go terribly, terribly wrong before the war started. And the fact that the oilfields could have been set aflame like they were in Kuwait, the fact that we could have had mass refugees and dislocations and it didn't happen. The bridges could have been blown up. There could have been a fortress Baghdad with a moat around it with oil in it and people fighting to the death. So a great many of the bad things that could have happened did not happen.' I heard a journalist ask him: 'Was a robust insurgency on your list that you gave the President?' And I heard Rumsfeld reply: 'I don't remember whether that was on there.'

In 2005 I heard about 2003. I heard a US marine, who was a witness to the event, say that the story of the capture of Saddam Hussein was a fiction. Saddam had been caught the day before in a small house, and then placed in an abandoned well, which was invented as the 'spider hole' where he was hiding. I never heard about this marine again.

In 2005 I heard about 2004. I heard that, during the attack on Fallujah, the President had suggested to Tony Blair that the headquarters of the al-Jazeera network in Qatar should be bombed. I heard that Blair persuaded him that it wasn't such a good idea.

\*

Because it was difficult for the military to attract new recruits, I heard that an army directive recommended 'alleviating the personnel crunch by retaining soldiers who are earmarked for early discharge during their first term of enlistment because of alcohol or drug abuse, unsatisfactory performance, or being overweight, among other reasons'. I heard that the Pentagon had asked Congress to raise the maximum age for military recruits from 35 to 42.

I heard that the US military was actively recruiting in Latin America, offering citizenship in exchange for service. I heard that Hispanic-Americans make up 9.5 per cent of the actively enlisted, but 17.5 per cent of those given the most dangerous assignments.

I heard that the government had offered \$15,000 cash bonuses to National Guard personnel who agreed to extend their enlistment. I heard that the government never paid, and cancelled the offer after many had signed up.

I heard that in veterans' hospitals, the only television news that is permitted is the Pentagon Channel, a 24-hour news station that features programmes like *Freedom Journal Iraq*.

I heard Rory Mayberry, a former food manager for Halliburton in Iraq, say that they routinely served the troops food that had expired by as much as a year. I heard that they would salvage food from convoys that had been attacked. I heard him say: 'We were told to go into the trucks and remove the food items and use them after removing the bullets and any shrapnel from the bad food that was hit.'

I heard that, in a poll of American soldiers in Iraq, more than half rated their unit's morale as 'low' or 'very low'.

I heard the Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine say that one in four veterans required medical treatment and that it expected that as many as 240,000 would suffer from some form of post-traumatic stress disorder. I heard a soldier say: 'My nightmares are so intense I woke up one night with my hands around my fiancée's throat.'

I heard that members of the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas were demonstrating at the funerals of soldiers who had died in Iraq, claiming that the war was divine retribution for American immorality. I heard that they held signs depicting 'homosexual acts', with the words 'God Hates Fags'; 'God Hates America'; 'Thank God for IEDs [roadside bombs]'; 'Fag Soldiers in Hell'; 'God Blew Up the Troops'; and 'Fags Doom Nations.'

I heard that headstones in Arlington National Cemetery were now being inscribed with the slogans 'Operation Enduring Freedom' and 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' along with the traditional name, rank and date of death of the deceased soldier. I heard Jeff Martell, who makes headstones for the cemetery, say: 'It just seems a little brazen that that's put on stones. It seems like it might be connected to politics.'

\*

On the first anniversary of the 'transfer of sovereignty', I heard that there had been 484 car bombs in the last year, killing at least 2221 people and wounding at least 5574. I heard 890 US soldiers had been killed in the last year and that there was now an average of 70 insurgent attacks a day. That same day I heard the President say: 'We fight today because terrorists want to attack our country and kill our citizens, and Iraq is where they are making their stand. So we'll fight them there, we'll fight them across the world, and we will stay in the fight until the fight is won.'

I heard him say: 'Iraq is the latest battlefield in this war. Many terrorists who kill innocent men, women and children on the streets of Baghdad are followers of the same murderous ideology that took the lives of our citizens in New York, in Washington and Pennsylvania.'

I heard him say: 'Some may disagree with my decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power, but all of us can agree that the world's terrorists have now made Iraq a central front in the War on Terror.'

And I remembered that, three years before, to justify the invasion, he had said: 'Imagine a terrorist network with Iraq as an arsenal and as a training ground.'

\*

I heard Tom DeLay, then still the House majority leader, say: 'You know, if Houston, Texas was held to the same standard as Iraq is held to, nobody'd go to Houston, because all this

reporting coming out of the local press in Houston is violence, murders, robberies, deaths on the highways.'

I heard Donald Rumsfeld say that the Shias 'are reaching out to the Sunnis and allowing them to come into the constitutional drafting process in a very constructive and healthy way. So there's an awful lot good that's happening in that country.'

I heard Scott McClellan, the White House press secretary, say: 'I think we have a clear strategy for success, and there is great progress being made on the ground. We are succeeding and we will succeed.'

I heard the President say: 'We have a clear path forward.'

I heard that Halliburton had built a wall around the Green Zone, made of 12-foot-high, five-ton concrete slabs, topped with concertina wire. I heard that mortars fired into the Green Zone often fell short and landed in the neighbourhoods just outside the wall, and that frustrated suicide bombers, unable to get into the Green Zone, would blow themselves up outside the wall. I heard Saman Abdel Aziz Rahman, the owner of the Serawan Kebab Restaurant, which is next door to a restaurant where a suicide bomber at lunchtime had killed 23 people, say: 'We are the new Palestine.' I heard Haider al-Shawaf, who lives on al-Shawaf Street, now bisected by the wall, say twice, in English: 'It was very nice street. It was very nice street.'

I heard the President say: 'America will not leave before the job is done.' I heard Dick Cheney predict that the fighting would be over by the time the administration ends in 2009.

\*

After Amnesty International compared American treatment of Afghan and Iraqi prisoners to the Gulag, I heard the President say: 'It's an absurd allegation. The United States is a country that promotes freedom around the world. It seemed like to me they based some of their decisions on the word of, and the allegations by, people who were held in detention, people who hate America, people that had been trained in some instances to disassemble – that means not tell the truth.'

I heard that most of the insurgent violence in Iraq was personally directed by a Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. I heard that rumours of his presence had led to the US bombings of Fallujah, Ramadi, Mosul, Samarra, and a village in Kurdistan, but each time he had narrowly escaped. I heard that he had been seen recently in Jordan, Syria, Iran and Pakistan. I heard that he was closely linked with Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and the government of Syria. I heard that he was the bitter enemy of bin Laden, the secularist Saddam and the secularist Syrian government. I heard that he had died in Afghanistan. I heard that, after an injury in Afghanistan, his leg had been amputated in a hospital in Iraq, which was proof of Saddam's connections to terrorism. I heard he was still walking on two legs. I heard he was one of the hooded men in a video showing the decapitation of a young American, Nick Berg, although the men never removed their hoods. I heard that he had died recently in Mosul when eight men blew themselves up rather than surrender to the US forces who had surrounded their house. I heard Sheikh Jawad al-Kalesi, an important Shia cleric in Baghdad, say that Zarqawi had been killed long ago, but the US was using him as a 'ploy'. I heard the President compare him to Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot. I heard that he had fewer than a hundred followers in Iraq.

I heard that there could be as many as a hundred groups responsible for the suicide bombings and I heard that many of them were connected to Ansar al-Islam, which had many more followers in Iraq than Zarqawi and had actual ties to Osama bin Laden before the war. Ansar al-Islam was almost never mentioned in administration speeches or in the press, since it is a Kurdish group, and all Kurds are presumed to be allies of the US.

I heard that unemployment for young men in Sunni areas was now 40 per cent. I heard that the annual per capita income was \$77, half of what it was the year before; and that only 37 per cent of families had homes connected to a sewage system, half of what it was before the war.

I heard General George Casey say: 'Iraq slowly gets better every day.' I heard Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Quarles, commander of the 4-3 Brigade Troops Battalion, say: 'It's hard to see all the progress that has been made. But things are getting better.'

I heard that the Pentagon was supposed to deliver a report to Congress on the training and capability of the Iraqi security forces, but that it had missed the deadline and was reluctant to release the report. I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'It's not for us to tell the other side, the enemy, the terrorists, that this Iraqi unit has this capability, and that Iraqi unit has this capability. The idea of discussing weaknesses, if you will, strengths and weaknesses - "this unit has a poor chain of command," or "these forces are not as effective because their morale's down." I mean, it would be mindless to put that kind of information out.'

I heard General William Webster say that the insurgents' ability 'to conduct sustained, high-intensity operations, as they did last year - we've mostly eliminated that.' In the next few days, I heard that suicide bombings in Baghdad had increased, including one at a school that killed some two dozen children, and the explosion in the central square of a stolen truck of liquefied gas, killing at least 71 people and wounding 156 others. I heard that the highest-ranking diplomat from Algeria had been kidnapped. I heard that the highest-ranking diplomat from Egypt had been kidnapped and killed. I heard that no Arab country would send an ambassador.

I heard an unnamed 'senior army intelligence officer' say: 'We are capturing or killing a lot of insurgents, but they're being replaced quicker than we can interdict their operations. There is always another insurgent ready to step up and take charge.' I heard him say that the US military was having a hard time understanding the insurgency's unlikely coalitions of secular Baath Party members and Islamic militants.

I heard that, after a car bomb killed several children, the Task Force Baghdad 3rd Infantry Division released a statement quoting an 'Iraqi man who preferred not to be identified': 'They are enemies of humanity without religion or any sort of ethics. They have attacked my community today and I will now take the fight to the terrorists.' A few weeks later, after a car bomb killed 25 people near the al-Rashad police station, I heard that the Task Force Baghdad 3rd Infantry Division released a statement quoting an 'Iraqi man who preferred not to be identified': 'They are enemies of humanity without religion or any sort of ethics. They have attacked my community today and I will now take the fight to the terrorists.'

I heard that the administration had decided it would no longer refer to a War on Terror. The new name was the Global Struggle against Violent Extremism.

I heard General Richard Myers say: 'I've objected to the use of the term "War on Terrorism"

before, because if you call it a war, then you think of people in uniform as being the solution. And it's more than terrorism. The long-term problem is as much diplomatic, as much economic – in fact, more diplomatic, more economic, more political than it is military.'

I heard that the administration had decided it would no longer refer to the Global Struggle against Violent Extremism, which was too long. The new name was now the old War on Terror.

I heard the President say: 'Make no mistake about it, we're at war. We're at war with an enemy that attacked us on September the 11th, 2001. We're at war against an enemy that, since that day, has continued to kill.'

I heard Abdul Henderson, a former marine corporal, say: 'We were firing into small towns. You see people just running, cars going, guys falling off bikes. It was just sad. You just sit there and look through your binos and see things blowing up, and you think, man they have no water, living in the third world, and we're just bombing them to hell. Blowing up buildings, shrapnel tearing people to shreds.'

\*

I heard a 'former high-level intelligence official' say: 'This is a war against terrorism, and Iraq is just one campaign. The Bush administration is looking at this as a huge war zone. Next we're going to have the Iranian campaign.' I heard Condoleezza Rice say that an invasion of Iran 'is not on the menu at this time'.

I heard that John Bolton, the new US ambassador to the United Nations, had said: 'There is no such thing as the United Nations. There is an international community that occasionally can be led by the only real power in the world – and that is the United States – when it suits our interest and when we can get others to go along.' I heard that he keeps a bronze hand grenade on his desk.

I heard the President say: 'This notion that the United States is getting ready to attack Iran is simply ridiculous. Having said that, all options are on the table.' I heard the White House press secretary, Scott McClellan, say: 'The President makes decisions based on what is right for the American people.'

I heard about despair. I heard the President say: 'As democracy in Iraq takes root, the enemies of freedom, the terrorists, will become more desperate.' I heard about hope. I heard him say: 'These terrorists and insurgents will fail. We have a strategy for success in Iraq. As Iraqis stand up, Americans and Coalition forces will stand down.'

I heard an unnamed 'top US commander' question how the current Iraqi Ministry of Defence, largely staffed by civilians appointed by the US, would be capable of maintaining an army: 'What is lacking are the systems that pay people, that supply people, that recruit people, that replace the wounded and AWOL, and systems that promote people and provide spare parts.' I heard that the ministry had deposited \$759 million in the personal bank account of a former money trader.

\*

I heard a White House spokesman, Trent Duffy, say: 'The President knows one of his most important responsibilities is to comfort the families of the fallen.' I heard Cindy Sheehan,

whose son Casey had been killed in Iraq, describe her meeting with the President.

I heard her say: 'He first got there, he walked in and said: "So who are we honouring here?" He didn't even know Casey's name, he didn't, nobody could have whispered to him: "Mr President, this is the Sheehan family, their son Casey was killed in Iraq." We thought that was pretty disrespectful to not even know Casey's name, and to walk in and say: "So who are we honourin' here?" Like: "Let's get on with it, let's get somebody honoured here." So anyway, he went up to my oldest daughter, I keep calling her my oldest daughter but she's actually my oldest child now, and he said: "So who are you to the loved one?" And Carly goes: "Casey was my brother." And George Bush says: "I wish I could bring your loved one back, to fill the hole in your heart." And Carly said: "Yeah, so do we." And Bush said: "I'm sure you do." And he gave her a dirty look and turned away from her.'

As the President moved to his ranch for a six-week summer vacation, Cindy Sheehan camped out at the entrance, demanding another meeting, which the President refused. I heard him say: 'I think it's important for me to be thoughtful and sensitive to those who have got something to say. But I think it's also important for me to go on with my life, to keep a balanced life. I think the people want the President to be in a position to make good, crisp decisions and to stay healthy. And part of my being is to be outside exercising.'

I heard that privately he had said: 'I'm not meeting again with that goddamned bitch. She can go to hell as far as I'm concerned.'

\*

I heard that 82 per cent of Iraqis were 'strongly opposed' to the presence of foreign troops and 45 per cent supported armed attacks against them. Less than 1 per cent believed that the foreign troops had made the country more secure.

I heard 'top military commanders' say that we could expect 'some fairly substantial reductions' in troops by next spring. I heard them add that the reduction would come after 'a short-term bulge in troop levels'.

I heard that 1100 bodies were brought to the Baghdad morgue in one month, many with hands bound and a bullet in the head. I heard that between 10 and 20 per cent were too disfigured to be identified. I heard that in the Saddam era the number was normally around 200. I heard that doctors were ordered not to perform post-mortems on bodies brought in by US troops.

On a single day, I heard that fighting had broken out between two Shia militias in Najaf, leaving 19 dead; that the bodies of 37 Shia soldiers, each killed with a single bullet to the head, had been found in a river south of Baghdad; that Jalal Talabani had escaped an assassination attempt in which eight of his bodyguards were killed and 15 injured. On that same day, I heard an 'unnamed White House official' say that the Iraqis were 'making substantial and real progress'.

I heard Condoleezza Rice say: 'It's a lot easier to see the violence and suicide bombing than to see the rather quiet political progress that's going on in parallel.' I heard her say that the insurgency was 'losing steam'.

As riots broke out in Baghdad over the lack of electricity, I heard Nadeem Haki, a shop-owner in Baghdad, say: 'We thank God that the air we breathe is not in the hands of the



government. Otherwise they would have cut it off for a few hours each day.'

I heard General Barry McCaffrey say, after returning from an inspection of Iraq: 'This thing, the wheels are coming off of it.'

\*

I heard that the President's approval rating had fallen to 36 per cent, lower than Nixon's during the summer of Watergate. I heard that 50 per cent now believed that sending troops to Iraq was a mistake. I heard Trent Duffy say that the President 'believes that those who want the US to begin to change course in Iraq do not want America to win the overall War on Terror. He can understand that people don't share his view that we must win the War on Terror - but he just has a different view.' I heard that the President, at a strategy meeting, had said: 'Who gives a flying fuck what the polls say? I'm the President and I'll do whatever I goddamn please. They don't know shit.'

I heard Donald Rumsfeld say: 'It's been alleged that we're not winning. Throughout history there have always been those who predict America's failure just around every corner. At the height of World War Two, many Western intellectuals praised Stalin. For a time, Communism was very much in vogue. Those being tossed about by the winds of concern should recall that Americans are a tough lot and will see their commitments through.'

I heard General Douglas Lute, director of operations at US Central Command, say that the US would withdraw a significant number of troops within a year. I heard him say: 'We believe at some point, in order to break this dependence on the Coalition, you simply have to back off and let the Iraqis step forward.' The day before, I heard the President say that withdrawal would 'only embolden the terrorists and create a staging ground to launch more attacks against America and free countries. So long as I'm the President, we will stay, we will fight, and we will win the War on Terror.'

I heard the President, still on vacation at his ranch, say: 'A time of war is a time of sacrifice.' I heard a reporter ask him if he planned to do any fishing, and I heard the President reply: 'I don't know yet. I haven't made up my mind yet. I'm kind of hanging loose, as they say.'

I heard that the US was now spending \$195 million a day on the war and that the cost had already exceeded, by \$50 billion, US expenses in all of World War One. I heard that \$195 million would provide 12 meals a day for every starving child on earth.

\*

I heard the President, at North Island Naval Air Station in San Diego, compare the War on Terror to World War Two. I heard him quote the words of Captain Randy Stone, a marine in Iraq: 'I know we will win because I see it in the eyes of the marines every morning. In their eyes is the sparkle of victory.' In a long speech, I heard him briefly mention Hurricane Katrina, which had struck a few days before and which, at the time, was believed to have killed tens of thousands. I heard him say: 'I urge everyone in the affected areas to continue to follow instructions from state and local authorities.'

I heard that the emergency response to the hurricane had been hampered because 35 per cent of the Louisiana National Guard and 40 per cent of the Mississippi National Guard, as well as much of their equipment and vehicles, were in Iraq. Approximately 5000 Guards and troops were eventually deployed; in 1992, following Hurricane Andrew in Florida, George

Bush Sr had sent in 36,000 troops. I heard that the Guardsmen in Iraq were denied emergency two-week leave to help or find their families. I heard they were told by their commanders that there were too few US troops in Iraq to spare them.

A few weeks after the hurricane, I heard the President say: 'You know, something we - I've been thinking a lot about how America has responded, and it's clear to me that Americans value human life, and value every person as important. And that stands in stark contrast, by the way, to the terrorists we have to deal with. You see, we look at the destruction caused by Katrina, and our hearts break. They're the kind of people who look at Katrina and wish they had caused it. We're in a war against these people. It's a War on Terror.'

\*

On the day after an estimated 200,000 people demonstrated against the war in Washington, a pro-war rally was held on the Mall. I heard Senator Jeff Sessions, Republican from Alabama, address the crowd: 'The group who spoke here the other day did not represent the American ideals of freedom, liberty and spreading that around the world. I frankly don't know what they represent.' The crowd was estimated at 400.

I heard that, along with the \$30 billion appropriated by Congress, the US Agency for International Development was also seeking private donations: 'Now you can donate high-impact development assistance that directly improves the lives of thousands of Iraqis.' I heard that USAID's 'extraordinary appeal' had raised \$600, but I heard Heather Layman, spokeswoman for USAID, say that she was not disappointed: 'Every little bit helps.'

In 2003, Dick Cheney had said: 'Since I left Halliburton to become George Bush's vice-president, I've severed all my ties with the company, gotten rid of all my financial interest. I have no financial interest in Halliburton of any kind and haven't had, now, for over three years.' I heard that he was still receiving deferred compensation and owned more than 433,000 stock options. Those options were worth \$241,498 in 2004. In 2005 they were worth more than \$8 million. Along with its \$10 billion no-bid contracts in Iraq, Halliburton was hired to expand the prison at Guantanamo and was among the first to receive a no-bid contract for Hurricane Katrina relief.

I heard the President say: 'At this moment, more than a dozen Iraqi battalions have completed training and are conducting anti-terrorist operations in Ramadi and Fallujah. More than 20 battalions are operating in Baghdad. And some have taken the lead in operations in major sectors of the city. In total, more than 100 battalions are operating throughout Iraq. Our commanders report that the Iraqi forces are operating with increasing effectiveness.'

An Iraqi battalion has about 700 soldiers. The next day I heard General George Casey tell Congress that the number of 'combat ready' Iraqi battalions had dropped from three to one. I heard him say: 'Iraqi armed forces will not have an independent capability for some time.' When asked when the American people can expect troops to be withdrawn from Iraq, I heard him reply: 'I don't want to get into a date. I wouldn't even want to go there, wouldn't even want to go there.'

I heard Colonel Stephen Davis, commander of Marine Regimental Combat Team 2, tell a group of Iraqis that the US was not leaving: 'We're not going anywhere. Some of you are concerned about the attack helicopters and mortar fire from the base. I will tell you this:

those are the sounds of peace.'

I heard General George Casey say that the insurgency 'is failing. We are more relentless in our progress than those who seek to disrupt it.'

I heard General John Abizaid say: 'The insurgency doesn't have a chance for victory.'

I heard Condoleezza Rice say: 'We have made significant progress.'

I heard Major General Rick Lynch, the chief military spokesman in Iraq, say: 'Zarqawi is on the ropes.'

As the administration celebrated the approval of the long-delayed constitution, I heard Safia Taleb al-Suhail – the daughter of a man who was executed by Saddam Hussein and who, in a staged moment during the State of the Union address, embraced the mother of an American soldier killed in Iraq – say: 'When we came back from exile, we thought we were going to improve rights and the position of women. But look what has happened – we have lost all the gains we made over the last 30 years. It's a big disappointment.'

I heard an Iraqi Shia sergeant say: 'Just let us have our constitution and elections in December and then we will do what Saddam did – start with five people from each neighbourhood and kill them in the streets and then go from there.'

\*

I heard Melvin Laird, secretary of defense under Nixon during the Vietnam War, call for the withdrawal of troops. I heard him say of the President: 'When troops are dying, the commander in chief cannot be coy, vague or secretive. His West Texas cowboy approach – shoot first and answer questions later, or do the job first and let the results speak for themselves – is not working.'

I heard Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser and a close friend of Bush Sr, say: 'I thought we ought to make it our duty to help make the world friendlier for the growth of liberal regimes. You encourage democracy over time, with assistance and aid, the traditional way. Not how the neo-cons do it.' They 'believe in the export of democracy, by violence if that is required. How do the neo-cons bring democracy to Iraq? You invade, you threaten and pressure, you evangelise.' I heard him say that America is now 'suffering from the consequences of this brand of revolutionary utopianism'.

I heard Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, Colin Powell's chief of staff at the State Department, say that foreign policy had been 'hijacked' by the 'Cheney-Rumsfeld cabal'. I heard him say that Rumsfeld was 'given carte blanche to tell the State Department to go screw itself in a closet somewhere'. I heard him say: 'If something comes along that is truly serious, something like a nuclear weapon going off in a major American city, or something like a major pandemic, you are going to see the ineptitude of this government in a way that will take you back to the Declaration of Independence.'

\*

I heard that 2000 US soldiers had been killed in Iraq; that 15,220 had been wounded in combat, including more than 7100 who were 'injured too badly to return to duty'; and that thousands more had been 'hurt in incidents unrelated to combat'.

I heard that a spokesman for the US military in Iraq, Lieutenant Colonel Steve Boylan, had sent an email to journalists asking them to downplay the marker of 2000 dead: 'When you report on the events, take a moment to think about the effects on the families and those serving in Iraq. The 2000 service members killed in Iraq supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom is not a milestone. It is an artificial mark on the wall set by individuals or groups with specific agendas and ulterior motives.'

I heard that 65 per cent of Americans now believed that the Iraq war was based on falsified information; only 42 per cent considered the President 'honest and ethical' and only 29 per cent considered Dick Cheney 'honest and ethical'.

I heard the President say: 'Anti-war critics are now claiming we manipulated the intelligence and misled the American people about why we went to war. The stakes in the global War on Terror are too high, and the national interest is too important, for politicians to throw out false charges. These baseless attacks send the wrong signal to our troops and to an enemy that is questioning America's will.'

I heard Dick Cheney say: 'The suggestion that's been made by some US senators that the President of the United States or any member of this administration purposely misled the American people on prewar intelligence is one of the most dishonest and reprehensible charges ever aired in this city.'

A few days later, I heard Dick Cheney complain that the 'liberal' media had distorted his remarks. As evidence, I heard him cite a headline that read: 'Cheney says war critics "dishonest, reprehensible".' Then, in the same speech, I heard him say: 'I will again say it is dishonest and reprehensible. This is revisionism of the most corrupt and shameless variety.'

\*

I heard Congressman John Murtha, Democrat from Pennsylvania, a marine colonel decorated in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and a prominent military hawk, with tears in his eyes call for the withdrawal of US troops within six months. I heard Scott McClellan say: 'It is baffling that he is endorsing the policy positions of Michael Moore and the extreme liberal wing.' I heard Congressman Geoff Davis, Republican from Kentucky, say: 'Ayman Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's deputy, as well as Abu Musab al Zarqawi, have made it quite clear in their internal propaganda that they cannot win unless they can drive the Americans out. And they know that they can't do that there, so they've brought the battlefield to the halls of Congress.' I heard Congresswoman Jean Schmidt, Republican from Ohio, say: 'Cowards cut and run. Marines never do.'

I heard the President say: 'Some contend that we should set a deadline for withdrawing US forces. Let me explain why that would be a serious mistake. Setting an artificial timetable would send the wrong message to the Iraqis, who need to know that America will not leave before the job is done.'

I heard that, at an extraordinary 'meeting of reconciliation', a hundred Shia, Sunni and Kurdish leaders had signed a statement demanding 'a withdrawal of foreign troops on a specified timetable'.

I heard that their statement also said: 'National resistance is a legitimate right of all nations.'

I heard Congresswoman Jean Schmidt say: 'The big picture is that these Islamic insurgents want to destroy us. They don't like us. They don't like us because we're black, we're white, we're Christian, we're Jew, we're educated, we're free, we're not Islamic. We can never be Islamic because we were not born Islamic. Now, this isn't the Islamic citizens. These are the insurgents. And it is their desire for us to leave so they can take over the whole Middle East and then take over the world. And I didn't learn this just in the last few weeks or the last few months. I learned this when I was at the University of Cincinnati in 1970, studying Middle Eastern history.'

\*

I heard that, in Fallujah and elsewhere, the US had employed white phosphorus munitions, an incendiary device, known among soldiers as 'Willie Pete' or 'shake and bake', which is banned as a weapon by the Convention on Conventional Weapons. Similar to napalm, it leaves the victim horribly burned, often right through to the bone. I heard a State Department spokesman say: 'US forces have used them very sparingly in Fallujah, for illumination purposes. They were fired into the air to illuminate enemy positions at night, not at enemy fighters.' Then I heard him say that 'US forces used white phosphorus rounds to flush out enemy fighters so that they could then be killed with high explosive rounds.' Then I heard a Pentagon spokesman say that the previous statements were based on 'poor information', and that 'it was used as an incendiary weapon against enemy combatants.' Then I heard the Pentagon say that white phosphorus was not an illegal weapon, because the US had never signed that provision of the Convention on Conventional Weapons.

I heard that US troops had accidentally come across an Interior Ministry bunker in Baghdad with more than 170 Sunni prisoners who had been captured by Shia paramilitary groups and tortured, some with electric drills. I heard Hussein Kamal, the deputy interior minister, say: 'One or two detainees were paralysed and some had their skin peeled off various parts of their bodies.' I heard a State Department spokesman, Adam Ereli, say: 'We don't practise torture. And we don't believe that others should practise torture.'

I heard that the Senate, after an hour of debate, voted to deny habeas corpus protection to prisoners in Guantanamo. The last time the US suspended the right to trial was during the Civil War.

I heard that a human rights organisation, Christian Peacemaker Teams, was distributing a questionnaire to inmates released from Iraqi prisons. Those surveyed were asked to check 'yes' or 'no' after each question:

- Stripped of your clothing (nude)?
- Beaten by hand (punches)?
- Beaten by stick or rod?
- Beaten by cables, wires or belts?
- Held at gunpoint?
- Hooded?
- Had cold water poured on you?
- Had a rope tied to your genitalia?
- Called names, insults?
- Threatened or touched by dogs?
- Dragged by rope or belt?
- Denied prayer or wudhu [ablution]?
- Forced to perform sexual acts?
- Were you raped or sodomised?

Did someone improperly touch your genitalia?  
Did you witness any sexual acts while in detention?  
Did you witness any rapes of men, women or children?  
Urinated on or made to touch faeces, or had faeces thrown at you?  
Denied sleep?  
Denied food?  
Witnessed any deaths?  
Did you witness any torture or mistreatment to others?  
Forced to wear woman's clothes? [Question for men only]  
Were you burned or exposed to extreme heat?  
Exposed to severe cold?  
Subjected to electric shock?  
Forced to act like a dog?  
Forced in uncomfortable positions for a lengthy period of time?  
Forced to stand or sit in a painful manner for lengthy periods of time?  
Lose consciousness?  
Forced to hit others?  
Hung by feet?  
Hung by hands or arms?  
Threatened to have family killed?  
Family members detained?  
Witnessed family members tortured?  
Forced to sign anything?  
Photographed?

I heard a man who had been in Abu Ghraib prison say: 'The Americans brought electricity to my ass before they brought it to my house.'

\*

I heard that the Lincoln Group, a public relations firm in Washington, had received \$100 million from the Pentagon to promote the war. As well as bribing Iraqi journalists, often with monthly stipends, the Lincoln Group was writing its own articles and paying Iraqi newspapers to publish them. I heard that the articles, intending to have local appeal, had titles such as 'The Sands Are Blowing toward a Democratic Iraq' or 'Iraqi Forces Capture al-Qaida Fighters Crawling like Dogs'. I heard a Pentagon spokesman, Major General Rick Lynch, say: 'We do empower our operational commanders with the ability to inform the Iraqi public, but everything we do is based on fact, not based on fiction.' I heard him quote the al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri: 'Remember, half the battle is the battlefield of the media.'

I heard that the average monthly war coverage on the ABC, NBC and CBS evening newscasts, combined, had gone from 388 minutes in 2003, to 274 in 2004, to 166 in 2005.

I heard that 2110 US troops had died in Iraq and more than 15,881 had been wounded. Ninety-four per cent of those deaths had come after the 'Mission Accomplished' speech, the first two sentences of which were: 'Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the Battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.' I heard there were now an average of a hundred insurgent attacks a day and an average of three American soldiers dying, the highest violence and casualty rates since the war began.

I heard that the President, in response to the increasing criticism, was going to reveal a new strategy for Iraq. On 30 November 2005, the administration issued a 35-page report: 'National Strategy for Victory in Iraq'. On a page headed 'Our Strategy Is Working', I read that, on the 'Economic Track', 'Our Restore, Reform, Build strategy is achieving results'; on



the 'Political Track', 'Our Isolate, Engage and Build strategy is working'; and on the 'Security Track', 'Our Clear, Hold and Build strategy is working.' General goals would be achieved in the 'short', 'medium' or 'long' term. The report ended with 'The Eight Strategic Pillars' ('Strategic Pillar One: Defeat the Terrorists and Neutralise the Insurgency; Strategic Pillar Two: Transition Iraq to Security Self-Reliance'), like the Five Pillars of Islam or *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. I heard that the 'Strategy' contained few specific details because it was the 'public version of a classified document'. Then I heard that there was no classified document.

That same day, I heard the President address the US Naval Academy in Annapolis. I heard him say: 'We will never back down. We will never give in. And we will never accept anything less than complete victory.' I heard him say: 'To all who wear the uniform, I make you this pledge: America will not run in the face of car bombers and assassins so long as I am your commander in chief.' In a front of a huge sign that read plan for victory, he stood at a podium bearing a huge sign that read plan for victory. I wondered whether 'plan' was a verb.

That same day, I heard that members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams had been kidnapped by members of the Swords of Islam.

The original source of this article is London Review of Books  
Copyright © [Eliot Weinberger](#), London Review of Books, 2005

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Eliot Weinberger](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)