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The march of folly, that has led to a bloodbath; THREE YEARS OF WAR IN IRAQ: SPECIAL EDITION

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It is the march of folly. In 1914, the British, French, and Germans thought they would be home by Christmas. On the 9th of April 2003, corporal David Breeze of the 3rd Battalion, 4th US Marine Regiment - the very first American to enter Baghdad - borrowed my satellite phone to call his home in Michigan. "Hi you guys, I'm in Baghdad," he told his mother. "I'm ringing to say 'Hi, I love you. I'm doing fine. I love you guys.' The war will be over in a few days. I'll see you all soon."

They were tough, those marines, big-boned men with muck on their faces and ferocity in their eyes - they had been fighting for days without sleep - but they too were on the same lonely journey of despair that the Old Contemptibles and the French poilus and the Bavarian infantry embarked upon almost a century ago.

Was this because we no longer have leaders who have experienced war at first hand? When I grew up, Churchill and MacMillan were Prime Ministers, men who fought in the First World War and who led us through the Second World War. Eden had been in the wartime Cabinet with Churchill. Tito had been wounded by German shellfire in Yugoslavia, Jack Kennedy had commanded a torpedo boat in the Pacific, de Gaulle fought in the Great War, and later helped to liberate France from the Nazis, but Blair, however much he may claim to be a friend of God, has no such distinction' nor Bush, who dodged Vietnam' nor Cheney, who also dodged Vietnam' nor Gordon Brown, nor Condoleezza Rice' nor John Howard of Australia. Colin Powell was in Vietnam' but he has gone, trailing his ignominious February 2003 UN performance on weapons of mass destruction.

Instead, the little men dressed up in the clothes of dead titans. Bush and Blair thought they were Churchills or Roosevelts. They flaunted themselves along with Aznar of Spain as the Big Three: Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin' though I never discovered which of them was supposed to play the Soviet mass-murderer, as they conspired in the Azores for war. They claimed that Saddam was the Hitler of Baghdad. My old, messianic friend Tom Friedman, a New York Times columnist, got it right when he described Saddam as part Donald Duck and part Don Corleone, but this was not the kind of reality that Bush or Blair were interested in.

They were the quick-fix men, the instant statesmen, the guys who had handle on war. Post-war control and reconstruction? Forget it, the Iraqis will do as we tell them after they have greeted us with roses and songs. Winston Churchill set up a British cabinet committee to organise the administration of postwar occupied Germany in 1941: four years before the end of the Second World War, and at a time when we still expected a Wehrmacht invasion of Britain. The Churchill frauds had not even bothered to create such a committee for days before their invasion of Iraq.

For this was to be an ideological war. From its creation by the loonies of the American right - as a pro-Israeli policy to aid Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu - and then foisted on Bush, to the hell-disaster that **Iraq** now represents, the real war had to be turned into myth' nightmares into dreams' destruction into hope' terrible truths into profound mendacity.

Even today the occupation powers tell awesome lies. Democracy is taking hold when the "Iraqi" government controls only a few acres of Baghdad greensward. The insurgency is being crushed when 40,000 armed Iraqis are ripping into the greatest army on Earth' freedom is taking hold when thousands of Iraqis are dying each month. "Operation Swarmer" is now supposedly targeting those who want a civil war in **Iraq**. Some of the men who are trying to provoke civil war however, work for the Iraqi Interior Ministry, and are paid, ultimately, by us.

For the truth, we should turn to a well-known analyst who warned us that in **Iraq**, the British have been "led into a trap from which it shall be hard to escape with dignity and honour. They have been tricked into it by a steady withholding of information. The Baghdad communiqués are belated, insincere, incomplete. Things have been far worse than we have been told. Our administration more bloody and inefficient than the public knows... We are today not far from a disaster." This is the most concise and accurate account I have yet read of our present folly.

It was written about the British occupation of **Iraq** in 1920 by Lawrence of Arabia. In the long nights of 2003, when the dangers of each day under US bombardment were replaced by the insomnia of bomb-blasts in the Baghdad darkness outside. I would curl up like an animal in my bed and thumb through the predictions of this present folly.

I read a fearful prophecy by the evangelical preacher Pat Buchanan written five months before we illegally invaded **Iraq**. "This invasion will not be the cake-walk neo-conservatives predict," he said. "Terrorist attacks in liberated **Iraq** seem as certain as in liberated Afghanistan. For a militant Islam... will never accept George Bush dictating the destiny of the Islamic world... Pax Americana will reach apogee but then the tide recedes' for the one endeavour at which Islamic peoples excel is expelling imperial powers by terror and guerrilla warfare." There were the dreary precedents. Muslims drove the Brits out of Palestine and Aden' the French out of Algeria' the Russians out of Afghanistan' the Americans out of Somalia' and Beirut, the Israelis out of Lebanon. As Buchanan wrote, "we have started up the road to empire, and over the next hill we will meet those who went before." However, we shall not count the bodies.

What was it Bush told us a few weeks ago? That 30,000 Iraqis had been killed since the invasion, his very words a racist admission' for what he actually said was: "30,000 more or less". More or less, give or take a few hundred. Would he have dared to say that US casualties were "2,000 more or less"? Of course not. Our dead are precious' they are individuals with widows and children. The Iraqis? Well, they are lesser beings whose casualties cannot be revealed to us by the Iraqi Ministry of Health, on orders from the Americans and British' creatures whose suffering, far greater than our own, must be submerged in the democracy and freedom in which we are drowning them' whose casualties "More or less" are probably nearer to 150,000. After all, if 1,000 Iraqis could die by violence last July - in Baghdad alone' and if they are being killed at 60 or 70 a day, then we have a near genocidal bloodbath on our hands. Iraqis, however, are now our Untermenschen for whom, frankly, we do not greatly care.

Civil war? There never was a civil war? It is a tribal, not a sectarian society. Some organisation wants a civil war' oddly, it was an occupation force's spokesman, a certain Dan Senor, who first

warned of civil war in **Iraq** at an Anglo-American press-conference in 2003. Why? We talk of civil war far more than the Iraqis do. Why? Repeatedly, we are told that Iraqis and Westerners are kidnapped by "Men wearing police uniforms" or by "Men wearing army uniforms".

What is this nonsense? Are we really to believe that there is a vast warehouse in Fallujah containing 8,000 made-to-measure police uniforms for potential insurgents? No! The truth is that many of the policemen and soldiers or **Iraq**, upon whose loyalty and courage our retreat, according to Bush, depends, are themselves insurgents. So deeply have the nationalists/Islamists forces infiltrated these men that the Bush-Blair promises of withdrawal are the very opposite of the truth. We are on our own. We may persuade our ex-spoops, like the former "interim prime minister" Iyad Alawi, who obediently claimed yesterday that there was a civil war in progress, to try to frighten Iraqis. The reality is that our armed presence in **Iraq** is destroying an entire people.

So we proceed down the crumbling staircase. Let us forget the weapons of mass destruction' the 45-minute warning' the links between Saddam and 11 September 2001' the dossiers' and the lies' and our torture - yes, torture, at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay' and the ever-widening chasm between Blair's tomfoolery and the truth. Bush told us yesterday that "More sacrifices will be required". You bet they will be if we continue this march of folly.