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# counterpunch

**edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair**

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April 8, 2004

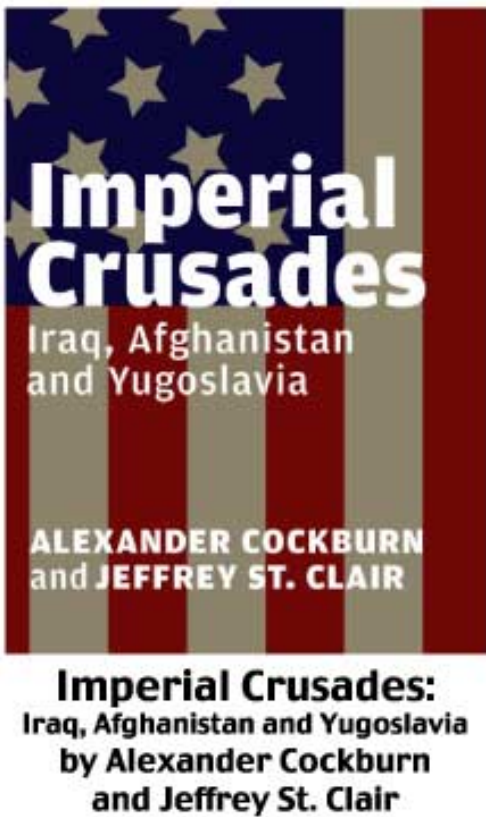
## The War's One Simple Truth

### Iraqis Do Not Want Us

By ROBERT FISK

**A** war founded on illusions, lies and right-wing ideology was bound to founder in blood and fire. Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. He was in contact with al-Qa'ida, he was involved with the crimes against humanity of 11 September. The people of Iraq would greet us with flowers and music. There would be a democracy.

Even the pulling-down of Saddam's statue was a fraud. An American military vehicle tugged the wretched thing down while a crowd of only a few hundred Iraqis watched. Where



were the tens of thousands who should have pulled it down themselves, who should have been celebrating their "liberation"?

On the night of 9 April last year, the BBC even managed to find a "commentator" to heap abuse on me and The Independent for using quotation marks around the word "liberation".

In fact, freedom from Saddam's dictatorship in those early days and weeks meant freedom to loot, freedom to burn, freedom to kidnap, freedom to murder. The initial American and British blunder--to allow the mobs to take over Baghdad and other cities--was followed by the arrival of the far more sinister squads of arsonists who systematically destroyed every archive, every government ministry (save for Oil and Interior which were, of course, secured by US troops), Islamic manuscripts, national archives and irreplaceable antiquities. The very cultural identity of Iraq was being annihilated.

Yet still the Iraqis were supposed to rejoice in their "liberation". The occupying power sneered at reports that women were being kidnapped and violated--in fact, the abductions of men as well as women were at the rate of 20 a day and may now be as high as 100 a day--and steadfastly refused to calculate the numbers of Iraqi civilians killed each day by gunmen, thieves and American troops.

Even this week, as the promises and lies and obfuscations fell apart, the American military spokesman was still only able to give military casualties--this when more than 200 Iraqis are reported to have been killed in the US attack on Fallujah.

Over the months, the isolation of the occupation authorities from the Iraqi people they were supposed to care so much about was only paralleled by the vast distance in false hope and self-deceit between the occupying powers in Baghdad and their masters back in Washington.

Paul Bremer, America's proconsul in Iraq, started off by calling the resistance "party remnants", which is exactly what the Russians used to call their Afghan opponents after they invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Then Mr Bremer called them "diehards". Then he called them "dead-enders". And, as the attacks against US forces increased around Fallujah and other Sunni Muslim cities, we were told this area was the "Sunni triangle", even though it is much larger than that implies and has no triangular shape.

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Sen. Robert Byrd

So when President Bush made his notorious trip to the Abraham Lincoln to announce the end of all "major military operations"--beneath a banner claiming "Mission Accomplished"--and when attacks against US troops continued to rise, it was time to rewrite the chapter on post-war Iraq. "Foreign fighters" were now in the battle, according to the US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld. The US media went along with this nonsense, even though not a single al-Qa'ida operative has been arrested in Iraq and of the 8,500 "security detainees" in American hands, only 150 appear to be from outside Iraq. Just 2 per cent.

Then as winter approached and Saddam was caught and the anti-American resistance continued, the occupying powers and their favourite journalists began to warn of civil war, something no Iraqi has ever indulged in and which no Iraqi has ever been heard discussing. Iraq was now to be frightened into submission. What would happen if the Americans and British left? Civil war, of course. And we don't want civil war, do we?

The Shia remained quiescent, their leadership divided between the scholarly and pro-Western Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and the impetuous but intelligent Muqtada Sadr. They opened their mass graves and mourned those thousands who were tortured and executed by Saddam's butchery and then asked why we used to support Saddam, why it took us 20 years to discover the need to stage our humanitarian invasion.

If the occupation authorities had bothered to study the results of a conference on Iraq held by the Centre for Arab Unity Studies in Beirut recently, they might be forced to acknowledge what they cannot admit: that their opponents are Iraqis and that this is an Iraqi insurgency.

An Iraqi academic, Sulieman Jumeili, who lives in the city of Fallujah, told how he discovered that 80 per cent of all rebels killed were Iraqi Islamist activists. Only 13 per cent of the dead men were primarily nationalists and only 2 per cent had been Baathists.

But we cannot accept these statistics. Because if this is an Iraqi revolt against us, how come they aren't grateful for their liberation? So, after the atrocities in Fallujah just over a week ago when four US mercenaries were killed, mutilated and dragged through the streets, General Ricardo Sanchez, the US commander in Iraq, sanctioned what is preposterously called "Operation Vigilant Resolve". And now that Sadr's thousands of Shia militiamen had joined in the

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battle against the Americans, General Sanchez had to change the narrative yet again.

No longer were his enemies Saddam "remnants" or even al-Qa'ida; they were now "a small (sic) group of criminals and thugs". The Iraqi people would not be allowed to fall under their sway, General Sanchez said. There was "no place for a renegade militia".

So the marines smashed their way into Fallujah, killing more than 200 Iraqis, including women and children, while using tanks fire and helicopter gunships against gunmen in the Baghdad slums of Sadr City. It took a day or two to understand what new self-delusion had taken over the US military command. They were not facing a country-wide insurgency. They were liberating the Iraqis all over again! So, of course, this will mean a few more "major military operations". Sadr goes on the wanted list for a murder after an arrest warrant that no one told us about when it was mysteriously issued months ago--supposedly by an Iraqi judge--and General Mark Kimmitt, General Sanchez's number two, told us confidently that Sadr's militia will be "destroyed".

And so the bloodbath spreads ever further across Iraq. Kut and Najaf are now outside the control of the occupying powers. And with each new collapse, we are told of new hope. Yesterday, General Sanchez was still talking about his "total confidence" in his troops who were "clear in their purpose", how they were making "progress" in Fallujah and how--these are his actual words, "a new dawn is approaching".

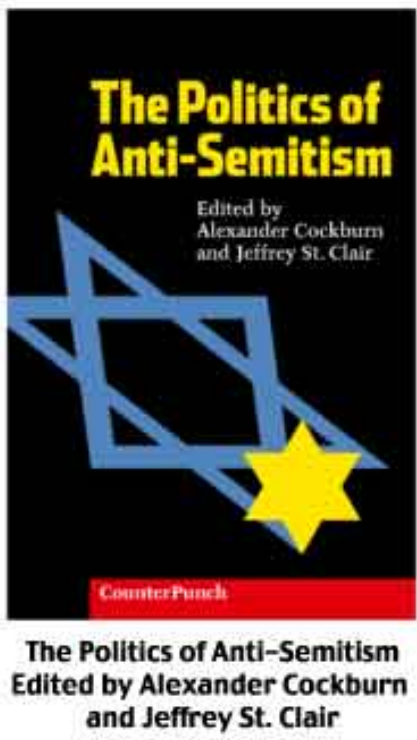
Which is exactly what US commanders were saying exactly a year ago today--when US troops drove into the Iraqi capital and when Washington boasted of victory against the Beast of Baghdad.

**Robert Fisk** is a reporter for The Independent and author of [Pity the Nation](#). He is also a contributor to CounterPunch's hot new book, [The Politics of Anti-Semitism](#).

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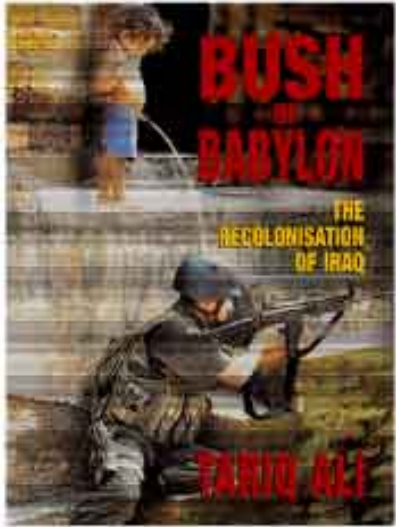
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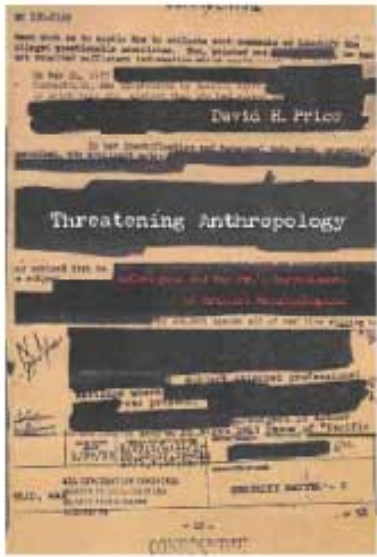
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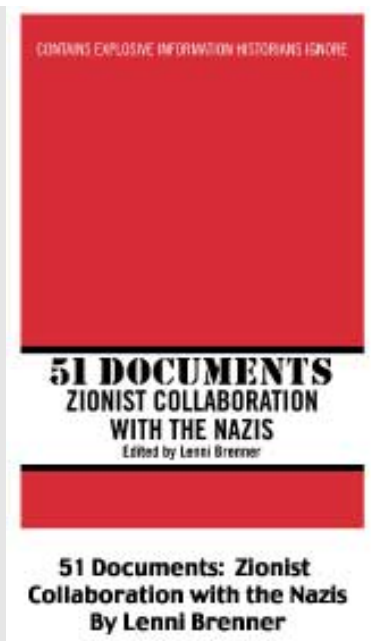
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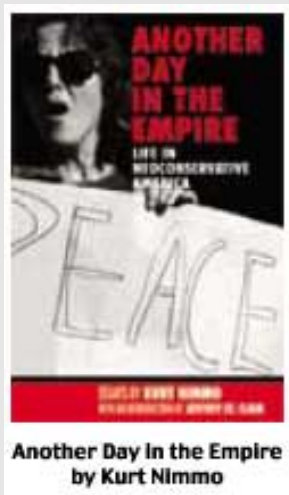
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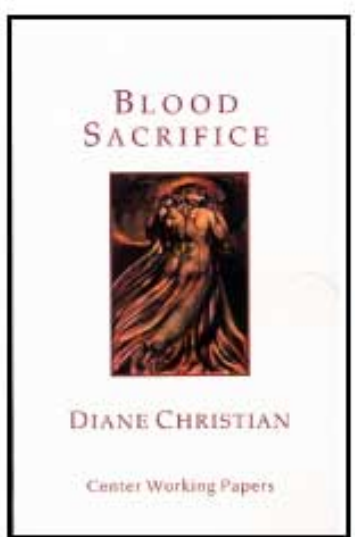
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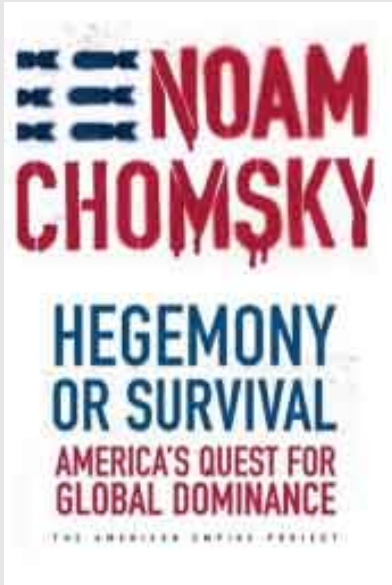
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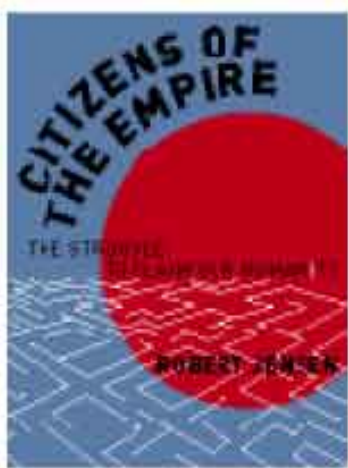
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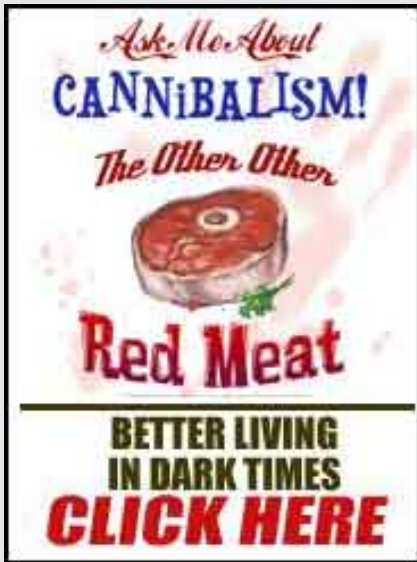
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