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Pardoning the Pentagon

By [Molly Ivins](#), [AlterNet](#). Posted [March 28, 2006](#).

The Pentagon has investigated its own habit of paying people to lie -- and, lo and behold, it found itself not guilty.

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The Pentagon has once again investigated itself! And -- have a seat, get the smelling salts, hold all hats -- the Pentagon has once again concluded the Pentagon did absolutely nothing wrong and will continue to do so.

In this particularly fascinating case, the Pentagon investigated its own habit of paying people to make up lies about how well the war in Iraq is going, and then paying other people to put those lies in the Iraqi media, thus fooling the Iraqis into thinking everything in their country is tickety-boo. Well, if we can't fool them, whom can we fool?

The case revolves around a contract worth several million dollars given by the U.S. military command in Baghdad to the Lincoln Group, a public relations outfit started by two young entrepreneurs, one British, one American, in 2003 in Iraq. Articles were written by American military personnel from the American point of view about the war -- to wit, it's going well. Lincoln Group in turn paid Iraqi journalists, some "on retainer," to print the articles without revealing the source.

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Amusingly enough, through other programs, the U.S. government is also spending money trying to teach Iraqis about the importance of a free press in a democracy. According to the Pentagon's investigation of itself, none of the Lincoln Group's actions violate military policies because the Pentagon is just trying to counter the vast amount of anti-American propaganda carried in Middle Eastern papers.

While I think this is the best Pentagon-investigating-itself case of the week, I have to admit it's like the Oscars -- these investigations are so hard to compare to comedy and tragedy, documentary and animated shorts. Also featured this week is the case of the Abu Ghraib dog handler, a 24-year-old sergeant who was convicted for tormenting detainees. The dog was not convicted, on the theory that it was just acting on orders.

Despite the huge international outcry over torture, so far the heavy-hitters in the plot receiving real red, white and blue justice are Lynndie England, a 5-foot-tall, 23-year-old woman with learning disabilities and other non-commissioned officers. They were clearly the mastermind behind the entire international stink fest, from Gitmo to Afghanistan. England was put in prison for three years. Her baby boy will be walking and talking by the time Ms. England finishes doing her time, but no one in the upper ranks is responsible for anything that's happened.

In the unfortunate case of the Black Room reported in The New York Times, we taxpayers seem to have been charged with the cost of refurbishing one of Saddam Hussein's military bases into "a top secret detention center." One former torture chamber is now an "interrogation cell" used by Special Operations forces. "In the windowless, jet-black garage-sized room, some soldiers beat prisoners with rifle butts, yelled and spit in their faces and, in a nearby area, used detainees for target practice in a game of jailer paintball." I say, this time, let's indict the dogs.

Of course, there is always the same depressing coda to new accounts of torture and mistreatment of prisoners by American troops -- no useful information was acquired.

With all these horrifying details surfacing ("No Blood, No Foul" was the slogan at the Special Operations forces' Camp Nama), you may wonder why I return to the case of the chipper newspaper articles. I find them deeply symbolic, certainly paradigmatic and possibly even plangent, a word that's hard to work into a newspaper column. Quite some time after we had invaded Iraq, our government informed us we had done so in order to bring democracy to their nation. Originally, we were told we had to invade their country because there were tons of weapons of mass destruction therein, but they turned out not to be there. So, through a process of masterly media manipulation, we went from Saddam's nuclear program to democracy. It seems to me this is how George W. Bush and Co. govern, period. It's a Karl Rove thing. When reality is unsatisfactory, just manipulate the media.

You can't deny that the process has excellent results. It wins elections, for one thing. It confuses our critics and turns debate away from what we might loosely call "the truth" and into pointless fistfights about whether Iraq has descended, is descending or might descend into civil war.

"How dare you call it a civil war -- you're just lending comfort to our enemies."

"Looks like a civil war to me."

"Does not -- where's Lee, where's Grant?"

"Does so!"

This is not helpful dialogue -- remember the fight over whether there was an "insurgency" in Iraq or the Mission was still Accomplished, it was just "remnant Baathists and foreign terrorists?" That was a mirror of the arguments we had at home over whether President Bush could be described as a "friend" of Ken Lay's or whether he is "close" to Tom DeLay or "knows" Jack Abramoff. Likewise, entire policy discussions would get subsumed by furious debate over whether Bush's proposals meant "privatization" of Social Security or were merely "personal accounts."

Grabbing reality by the throat and forcing it into a form you find more pleasing than reality itself is not only a great election strategy, it works for a lot of people on a lot of levels in life -- denial is a good game while it lasts.

But as we can all attest, if you ignore reality, sooner or later it will bite you in the ass. I suspect the "tough- minded" (they pride themselves on being tough-minded) members of the Bush administration think they are not ignoring reality, but just persuading other people to ignore it long enough to allow them to change it. This is not an original thought. Many of the great thumb-suckers of D.C. have come to the same conclusion and pondered deeply on the "fatal hubris" of this administration. Fatal jackasses are what we have.

Faced with the unappetizing reality of Iraq, Bush and Rove are relying on that grand old reliable strategy -- attack the media. It doesn't play as well as it used to. Everyone who wants an alternative reality is already watching Fox News. The rest of the country is worried.

Let me hasten to admit that I have no solution -- I have tried to be constructive over the course of this war, but I'm flat out of ideas. I haven't an earthly clue whether it would be better if we up and left or if we sat and stayed. What I am sure of is that none of us will figure that out until we stop pretending, until we take a long, cold hard look at the reality on the ground. Then someone needs to level with us about what it will cost to stay, in lives and dollars and, God help us, goodwill.

In a Washington Monthly book review, I found a suggestion that we copy Cold War tactics on terrorism and practice "containment" rather than this War of Good vs. Evil, Battlestar Galactica bull. But that requires someone who will level with the people. And the more this administration plays games with definitions of democracy and weasel wording about torture, the less they can be believed about anything. Like the boy who cried wolf, someday they're going to tell the truth, and no one will

believe them.

Meantime, let us all enjoy the game of Pentagon-investigates-itself. Just remember, sooner or later, we'll have to indict the dogs.

Molly Ivins writes about politics, Texas and other bizarre happenings.

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Here's a clue

Posted by: ScottP on Mar 28, 2006 12:47 PM [\[Report this comment\]](#)

I always find Molly's work amusing and enlightening, and this article is no exception. But I'm clueless as to why she included this:

I haven't an earthly clue whether it would be better if we up and left or if we sat and stayed

Here's a hint: the occupation is what's driving their economy down the tubes and causing 50% unemployment. The so-call reconstruction is actually a scam in which all the Iraqi engineers were fired and greedy profiteers pocket the money, and the less they do the more they make. The US forces are doing another School of the Americas thing and training death squads. The army is behaving like a bunch of wild kids who think running around in the desert with heavy weapons killing people is just good old fun. Rumsfeld is back to his sadistic old tricks: kill, kill, kill. Given that hint, do you now have an idea as to whether we should continue to waste \$100B a year destroying an nation and making a world full of enemies, or whether we should begin the exit today?

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» [Exit? Do you want Iraq under Iran's thumb?](#) Posted by: Sojourner

» [No, but it's not an either or](#) Posted by: peritonlogon

» [Yeah, but is that an "exit"? Or just a redeployment?](#) Posted by: Sojourner

» [RE: xit? Do you want Iraq under Iran's thumb?](#) Posted by: andrewgirma

» [RE: xit? Do you want Iraq under Iran's thumb?](#) Posted by: andrewgirma

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Tough guys?

Posted by: Gtrpicker on Mar 28, 2006 4:28 PM [[Report this comment](#)]

Where does this come from, this "Bush is a tough guy" nonsense? Anyone who saw the clip in "Farhenheit 911" of Bush in the classroom and saw the look on his face knows this guy is only tough when he knows he can push someone around. The look on his face in that classroom was the look of someone who just shit himself and wonders if everyone else knows too. There is nothing real about him or any one in his administration (except for the heartbreak and terror we are all dealing with, that is all too real) and we should all stop waiting for them to do something that doesn't reek of bullshit.

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Get out, pay up

Posted by: phindrup on Mar 28, 2006 4:34 PM [[Report this comment](#)]

From one of the Iraqi sites I read: 'If the US (coalition) leave, we will have a mess, but it will be our mess!'

No question, the coalition ought to get to hell out.

Next, as the illegal invaders they ought to be up for the entire cost of rebuilding all that they have destroyed — reparation.

That is fork over the cash, gold, international credits or whatever, and have no say who contracts for the work, or who is permitted to tender for the work.

It would be difficult to put a price on attempting to recover looted art treasures, that were looted while the country was under their 'stewardship', but the cost of the search, and the cost of subsequent restoration ought to be sheeted to their account, plus compensation — though how is it possible to compensate for the loss of art and artefacts that were of untold significance not only to the Iraqis, but to the world? — for that that is not recovered?

Then there ought to be compensation to the families of all those Iraqis slaughtered in this ill conceived adventure, plus a component for the horrors and pain inflicted.

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» [Since no one, yet, can speak for Iraq but only their faction...](#) Posted by: Sojourner

Iraq - The Inevitable Solution

Posted by: bohdan on Mar 28, 2006 7:39 PM [[Report this comment](#)]

"Sometimes we can predict the future if someone just wants to believe it."

IRAQ –the Votes, the Tally, the War:

"The Inevitable"

The Bush Administration keeps stating that "we" cannot leave Iraq: until the votes for democracy are complete; until Iraqis establish a democratic government, until Iraqi forces can protect their citizens, not until...

Well, not until we realize The Inevitable will the true Iraqi solution come forth. It's the obvious one, the one that Iraqis are in the midst of forming themselves through violence.

This "insurgency" is not going to end until the most important lines are finally drawn, --- the boundary lines, separating each "tribe" into their own ruling domains.

Mankind has always and will always fight to the end for their country, their territory, their religion, their everything....

That is a Truth of any country, any heritage. Call it nationalism, call it anything you want except an untruth.

Presently, lines already mark territories guarded by numerous militias that answer only to their own leaders.

Therefore --- The INEVITABLE --- divide Iraq into three countries: Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites. And most important, divide the wealth equally. Then and only then can true nation building take place. That should have been the goal from the beginning.

Iran will control the south no matter what. If Turkey invades the Kurdish "nation" then NATO is nothing more than a farce. Central Iran (Sunni) can then play out it's power over itself, as will the others.

If it's still not too late, perhaps it's worth diverting our efforts towards that solution.

But would the Bush Administration condone such a change in its policy, it would mean admitting a mistake --- and aren't they all infallible --- in their own words, in their own minds, it's always someone else's fault - (does "faulty intelligence" come to mind?)

"Stay the Course" has been their eternal mantra, a course mapped by lies.

Truth requires Courage, while Strength requires character, and Wisdom will ensure a lasting and true peace. Yet none of those qualities can be in effect until the curtain of lies is lifted. And that is where Courage still waits its turn.

Does the Administration have the Strength, Courage, and Wisdom to understand the future --- and not use the excuse of, "...nobody could have predicted, nobody could have imagined."

Republicans used that excuse in their past, from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the insurgency in Iraq. It's become an idiot's answer to the very end of time.

If they only saw the Truth..... they could predict the future!

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solution is in the behind

Posted by: rsaxto on Mar 29, 2006 3:50 AM [[Report this comment](#)]

The Bushies can't let reality bite them in the ass so they wind up biting all the world in the ass. We got to withdraw from Iraq soon or else the whole Middle East will bite America in the ass. We got to censure and impeach so we can withdraw from Iraq soon so the Bushies beloved Armageddon won't bite the universe in the ass.

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