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The War is Lost

By William Rivers Pitt
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We have traveled a long, dark, strange road since the attacks of September 11. We have all suffered, we have all known fear and anger, and sometimes hatred. Many of us have felt — probably more than we are willing to admit it — at one time or another a desire for revenge, so deep was the wound inflicted upon us during that wretched, unforgettable Tuesday morning in September of 2001.

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But we have come now to the end of a week so awful, so terrible, so wrenching that the most basic moral fabric of that which we believe is good and great — the basic moral fabric of the United States of America — has been torn bitterly asunder.

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We are awash in photographs of Iraqi men — not terrorists, just people — lying in heaps on cold floors with leashes around their necks. We are awash in photographs of men chained so remorselessly that their backs are arched in agony, men forced to masturbate for cameras, men forced to pretend to have sex with one another for cameras, men forced to endure attacks from dogs, men with electrodes attached to them as they stand, hooded, in fear of their lives.

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The worst, amazingly, is yet to come. A new battery of photographs and videotapes, as yet unreleased, awaits over the horizon of our abused understanding. These photos and videos, also from the Abu Ghraib prison, are reported to show U.S. soldiers gang raping an Iraqi woman, U.S. soldiers beating an Iraqi man nearly to death, U.S. troops posing, smirks affixed, with decomposing Iraqi bodies, and Iraqi troops under U.S. command raping young boys.

George W. Bush would have us believe these horrors were restricted to a sadistic few, and would have us believe these horrors happened only in Abu Ghraib. Yet reports are surfacing now of similar treatment



at another U.S. detention center in Iraq called Camp Bucca. According to these reports, Iraqi prisoners in Camp Bucca were beaten, humiliated, hogtied, and had scorpions placed on their naked bodies.

In the eyes of the world, this is America today. It cannot be dismissed as an anomaly because it went on and on and on in the Abu Ghraib prison, and because now we hear of Camp Bucca. According to the British press, there are some 30 other cases of torture and humiliation under investigation. The Bush administration went out of its way to cover up this disgrace, declaring secret the Army report on these atrocities. That, pointedly, is against the rules and against the law. You can't call something classified just because it is embarrassing and disgusting. It was secret, but now it is out, and the whole world has been shown the dark, scabrous underbelly of our definition of freedom.

The beginnings of actual political fallout began to find its way into the White House last week. Representative John Murtha of Pennsylvania, the House Democrats' most vocal defense hawk, joined Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to declare that the conflict is "unwinnable." Murtha, a Vietnam veteran, rocked the Democratic caucus when he said at a leader's luncheon Tuesday that the United States cannot win the war in Iraq.

"Unwinnable." Well, it only took about 14 months.

Also last week, calls for the resignation of Defense Secretary Don Rumsfeld became strident. Pelosi accused Rumsfeld of being "in denial about Iraq," and said U.S. soldiers "are suffering great casualties and injuries, and American taxpayers are paying an enormous price" because Rumsfeld "has done a poor job as secretary of defense." Representative Charlie Rangel, a leading critic of the Iraq invasion, has filed articles of impeachment against Rumsfeld.

So there's the heat. But let us consider the broader picture here in the context of that one huge word: "Unwinnable." Why did we do this in the first place? There have been several reasons offered over the last 16 months for why we needed to do this thing.

It started, for real, in January 2003 when George W. Bush said in his State of the Union speech that Iraq was in possession of 26,000 liters of anthrax, 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin, 500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX, 30,000 munitions to deliver this stuff, and that Iraq was seeking uranium from Niger to build nuclear bombs.

That reason has been scratched off the list because, as has been

made painfully clear now, there are no such weapons in Iraq. The Niger claim, in particular, has caused massive embarrassment for America because it was so farcical, and has led to a federal investigation of this White House because two administration officials took revenge upon Joseph Wilson's wife for Wilson's exposure of the lie.

Next on the list was September 11, and the oft-repeated accusation that Saddam Hussein must have been at least partially responsible. That one collapsed as well — Bush himself had to come out and say Saddam had nothing to do with it.

Two reasons down, so the third must be freedom and liberty for the Iraqi people. Once again, however, facts interfere. America does not want a democratic Iraq, because a democratic Iraq would quickly become a Shi'ite fundamentalist Iraq allied with the Shi'ite fundamentalist nation of Iran, a strategic situation nobody with a brain wants to see come to pass. It has been made clear by Paul Bremer, the American administrator of Iraq, that whatever the new Iraqi government comes to look like, it will have no power to make any laws of any kind, it will have no control over the security of Iraq, and it will have no power over the foreign troops which occupy its soil. This is, perhaps, some bizarre new definition of democracy not yet in the dictionary, but it is not democracy by any currently accepted definition I have ever heard of.

So...the reason to go to war because of weapons of mass destruction is destroyed. The reason to go to war because of connections to September 11 is destroyed. The reason to go to war in order to bring freedom and democracy to Iraq is destroyed.

What is left? The one reason left has been unfailingly flapped around by defenders of this administration and supporters of this war: Saddam Hussein was a terrible, terrible man. He killed his own people. He tortured his own people. The Iraqis are better off without him, and so the war is justified.

And here, now, is the final excuse destroyed. We have killed more than 10,000 innocent Iraqi civilians in this invasion, and maimed countless others. The photos from Abu Ghraib prison show that we, like Saddam Hussein, torture and humiliate the Iraqi people. Worst of all, we do this in the same prison Hussein used to do his torturing. The "rape rooms," often touted by Bush as justification for the invasion, are back. We are the killers now. We are the torturers now. We have achieved a moral equivalence with the Butcher of Baghdad.

This war is lost. I mean not just the Iraq war, but George W. Bush's ridiculous "War on Terror" as a whole.

I say ridiculous because this "War on Terror" was never, ever something we were going to win. What began on September 11 with the world wrapping us in its loving embrace has collapsed today in a literal orgy of shame and disgrace. This happened, simply, because of the complete failure of moral leadership at the highest levels.

We saw a prime example of this during Friday's farce of a Senate hearing into the Abu Ghraib disaster which starred Don Rumsfeld. From his bully pulpit spoke Senator Joe Lieberman, who parrots the worst of Bush's war propaganda with unfailingly dreary regularity. Responding to the issue of whether or not Bush and Rumsfeld should apologize for Abu Ghraib, Lieberman stated that none of the terrorists had apologized for September 11.

There it was, in a nutshell. There was the idea, oft promulgated by the administration, that September 11 made any barbarism, any extreme, any horror brought forth by the United States acceptable, and even desirable. There was the institutionalization of revenge as a basis for policy. Sure, Abu Ghraib was bad, Mr. Lieberman put forth. But September 11 happened, so all bets are off.

Thus fails the "War on Terror." September 11 did not demand of us the lowest common denominator, did not demand of us that we become that which we despise and denounce. September 11 demanded that we be better, greater, more righteous than those who brought death to us. September 11 demanded that we be better, and in doing so, we would show the world that those who attacked us are far, far less than us. That would have been victory, with nary a shot being fired.

Our leaders, however, took us in exactly the opposite direction.

Every reason to go to Iraq has failed to retain even a semblance of credibility. Every bit of propaganda Osama bin Laden served up to the Muslim world for why America should be attacked and destroyed has been given credibility by what has taken place in Iraq. Victory in this "War on Terror," a propaganda war from the beginning, has been given to the September 11 attackers by the hand of George W. Bush, and by the hand of those who enabled his incomprehensible blundering.

The war is lost.

*William Rivers Pitt is the senior editor and lead writer for **truthout**. He is a New York Times and international bestselling author of two books - 'War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn't Want You to Know' and 'The Greatest Sedition is Silence.'*

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