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Our Little Secrets

Welcome to Operation Manifest Failure

By Patrick Cockburn

Baghdad: A year ago, I drove into Baghdad from Iraqi Kurdistan past smouldering Iraqi tanks. The war had just ended. The statue of Saddam toppled. Government buildings burnt but there was still a feeling among those in the city that the worst was over. It is difficult to recapture that feeling today.

Now Iraq is a country where people fear to venture on to the streets. Whether you are a foreign contractor, a Muslim attending prayers or a journalist, this is a land of ever-present danger.

Yesterday, three Japanese journalists, eight South Korean church ministers and two Arab-Israelis were unfortunate enough to discover that harsh reality. We all wonder who it will be tomorrow.

Hours after they were kidnapped, shocking images of the bound Japanese captives with knives held to their throats were released by a previously unknown group called the Mujahedin Brigades. The Korean missionaries are now free but the two Arab-Israelis remain missing and concern is mounting for the safety of a British civilian who disappeared in the southern town of Nasiriyah on Tuesday.

The atmosphere in Baghdad has changed for the worse. At the entrance to the hotel where I am staying, there is a noticeboard near the reception desk. Last year, the pieces

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"Inadvertently, the Bush Administration has begun to destroy an alliance system that for the world's peace should have been abolished long ago. The Democrats are far less likely to continue that process."

Alliances and the Election

By Gabriel Kolko

Alliances have been a major cause of wars throughout modern history, removing inhibitions that might otherwise have caused Germany, France and countless nations to reflect much more cautiously before embarking on death and destruction. The dissolution of all alliances is a crucial precondition of a world without wars.

The United States' strength, to an important extent, has rested on its ability to convince other nations that it was in their vital interest to see America prevail in its global role. With the loss of that ability there will be a fundamental change in the international system, a change whose implications and consequences may ultimately be as far-reaching as the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. The scope of America's world role is now far more dangerous and ambitious than when Communism existed, but it was fear of the USSR that alone gave NATO its raison d'etre and provided Washington with the justification for its global pretensions.

Enemies have disappeared and new ones – many once former allies and congenial states – have taken their places. The United States, to a degree to which it is itself uncertain, needs alliances. But even friendly nations are less likely than ever to be bound into complaisant "coalitions of the willing'.

Nothing in President Bush's extraordinarily vague doctrine, promulgated on September 19, 2002, of fighting "preemptive" wars, unilaterally if necessary, was a fundamentally new departure. Since the 1890s, regardless of whether the Republicans or Democrats were in office, the U.S. has intervened in countless ways – sending in the Marines, installing and bolstering friendly tyrants – in the Western Hemisphere to determine the political destinies of innumerable southern nations. The Democratic Administration that established the United Nations explicitly regarded the hemisphere as the U.S.' sphere-of-influence, and at the same time created the IMF and World Bank to police the world economy.

Indeed, it was the Democratic Party that created most of the pillars of postwar American foreign policy, from the Truman Doctrine in 1947 and NATO through the institutionalization of the arms race and the core illusion that weapons and firepower are a solution to many of the world's political problems. So the Democrats share, in the name of a truly "bipartisan" consensus, equal responsibility for both the character and dilemmas of America's foreign strategy today. President Jimmy Carter initiated the Afghanistan adventure in July 1979, hoping to bog down the Soviets there as the Americans had been in Vietnam. And it was Carter who first encouraged Saddam Hussein to confront Iranian fundamentalism, a policy President Reagan continued.

In his 2003 book *The Roaring Nineties* Joseph E. Stiglitz, chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advis-

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of paper stuck on the board were mostly from Iraqis wanting jobs as translators for foreign companies and itemising their qualifications.

Today, there are no such notices. Too many translators have been killed or threatened for any Iraqi to advertise the fact that he or she wants to work for a foreigner.

Instead, there are three notices on the board from different companies all advertising armoured vehicles for sale. One of them says it can also offer body armour, adding seductively that this is in "limited quantity in the country". Few in Iraq will be celebrating the anniversary of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein today, though he was loathed by most Iraqis. They have little to celebrate.

And if anybody in my hotel has any doubts about their attitude to the anniversary, a gentle warning arrived this morning by fax. It is signed by "the Iraqi armed resistance" and was also sent to schools, businesses and government offices. It reads: "We warn you from putting up decorations, Iraqi flags or any celebration on 9/4/2004. Anybody who disobeys this order will be punished, especially those in charge."

I never thought that the American invasion of Iraq would end very happily, but it still seems extraordinary that a year after Americans entered the capital there are only 12 hours of electricity a day.

Outside the hotel where The Independent has its office I have to make a little jump every morning over a drain filled with raw sewage spouting out of a broken pipe nearby.

Nobody seems to be very interested in fixing it.

One quick way of gauging how things are going in Baghdad is to look at the four chimneys of the Daura power station which dominate the skyline in the south of the capital. If smoke is coming out of two or three it means that the electricity supply will be reasonable, but if only one chimney is producing smoke then there will not be enough power. Returning to Baghdad earlier this week, I noticed that for the first time since it was bombed in 1991, no smoke is coming out of any of the chimneys.

It did not have to happen this way. Saddam Hussein should not have been a hard act to follow. After 30 years of disastrous wars, Iraqis wanted a quiet life.

All the Americans really needed to do was to get the relatively efficient Iraqi administration up and running again. Instead, they let the government dissolve, and have never successfully resurrected it. It has been one of the most extraordinary failures in history.

The symbol of the new Iraq is the concrete block: enormous blocks 15ft high, like gigantic tombstones, are used as blast barriers around all the US-run Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) buildings. They have surrounded the hotels since the suicide bombings started last August.

Driving near Saddam's old Republican Palace, there are lines of these blocks several miles long on both sides of the road, turning it into a sort of dismal concrete canyon.

There are many more cars on the streets, perhaps 150,000 in Baghdad alone, because of the flood of imports after the war as the collapse of Iraqi customs meant that nobody had to pay import duty. For the same reason the pavements were heaped with new fridges, televisions, deep freezes, generators and television satellite equipment.

These days, almost everybody who had the money to buy these items has done so. Businessmen hoped that there would then be a boom in mobile phones. That has not really taken place. The reason is that the system chosen by the US administrators works only intermittently and is too expensive for most Iraqis. The US Army has insisted that its range should not be extended to towns around the capital in case the phones might be used by insurgents.

Only part of the ordinary phone system has been rebuilt. More importantly, for Iraqis who want to get on with their lives, personal security is now worse than in Saddam's time. Now criminals are better organised. And better armed. Safety is a daily concern for incomers and local residents alike.

There was a moment at the end of last summer when life in Baghdad seemed to be getting better, even if it had an awfully long way to go. Businessmen would express long-term optimism, saying: "The Americans cannot afford to fail." It is not a sentiment you hear any longer.

Once again, Iraqis are getting off the streets early. Even as I am writing this, I can hear the sound of mysterious explosions in the distance, which give an added sense of nervousness in a city already on edge. Earlier, three loud explosions had gone off in the so-called Green Zone where the CPA has its headquarters and smoke was seen rising. Panic is just below the surface. In the Amiriyah quarter this morning, all the shops suddenly closed because of a wave of fear that something bad was going to happen, though nobody could say what it would be.

We went to a mosque in the Adhamiyah quarter, a Sunni district where there had been a gun battle overnight. There was a large and angry crowd outside the Abu Hanifa mosque. The Iraqis with me said it might not be a good place to be a foreigner, so we went away without talking to them.

A prominent Iraqi businessman who returned from exile after the war told me this week that he never went out alone any more because of the danger of kidnapping. As an added security measure, he is not working in a large building owned by his company, but has rented an office in another part of the city where his face is not known.

And the foreigners do not have a mo-

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nopoly on horror stories. My friend explained that another Baghdad businessman's daughter was kidnapped and held for a ransom of $100,000. Her brother killed one of the kidnappers while trying to negotiate his sister's release. Her head was returned in a sack.

HOLD THOSE PULITZERS!

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

It's been a bad twelve months for American journalism. Given fourth estate gullibility re Bush's WMD claims, plus fictioneering at the New York Times and USA Today, I'd been hoping (with the dulled, hopeless hope that people on Death Row clutch to their bosoms) that maybe this year the Pulitzer Board would give its prizes a pass, at least so far as the press is concerned.

But the Pulitzer industry, eternally clubby and corrupt, is designed in part to reassure the citizens that, all available evidence notwithstanding, the press is a vigilant watchdog for our liberties and fully deserves those Constitutional protections that guarantee it a 20 per cent rate of return on capital invested.

People are dying in Fallujah and other towns across Iraq in part because the US press didn't do its job and mostly swallowed, hook, line, sinker, reel and rod, the WMD claims of Bush, Powell, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and the others.

Right now US forces, either in uniform or disguised as civilian contractors, are hunting for Sadr the Shia cleric on the grounds his newspaper is telling lies.

There's an idea! Send the troops into the New York Times newsroom and arrest Judith Miller! Then run across town and arrest the editor of the New Yorker for printing Jeffrey Goldberg's endless fictions about the Saddam-Al Qaeda connection.

The year after 9/11 they gave the New York Times seven Pulitzers, a ridiculous number. The Times's coverage was mostly maudlin tripe. The idea was to proclaim to the world that the Twin Towers may have fallen but New York City still could boast a titan to tell the tale.

This year the Los Angeles Times scoops five, which is still ridiculous. I guess the idea was to distract attention from the New York Times' fall from grace by whooping up a new titan the other end of the country. CP

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ers from 1993 to 1997, argues that the Clinton Administration intensified the "hegemonic legacy" in the world economy, and Bush is just following along. The 1990s, Stiglitz writes, was "A decade of unparalleled American influence over the global economy" that Democratic financiers and fiscal conservatives in key posts defined, "in which one economic crisis seemed to follow another…." The U.S. created trade barriers and gave large subsidies to its own agribusiness but countries in financial straits were advised and often compelled to cut spending and "adopt policies that were markedly different from those that we ourselves had adopted…."

The scale of domestic and global peculation by the Clinton and Bush administrations can be debated but they were enormous in both cases. In foreign and military affairs, both the Clinton and Bush administrations have suffered from the same procurement fetish, believing that expensive weapons are superior to realistic political strategies. The same illusions produced the Vietnam War – and disaster.

Elegant strategies promising technological routes to victory have been with us since the late 1940s, but they are essentially public relations exercises intended to encourage more orders for arms manufacturers, justifications for bigger budgets for the rival military services. During the Clinton years the Pentagon continued to concoct grandiose strategies, demanding – and getting – new weapons to implement them. There are many ways to measure defense expenditures over time but – minor annual fluctuations notwithstanding – the consensus between the two parties on the Pentagon's budgets has flourished since 1945.

In January 2000 Clinton added $115 billion to the Pentagon's 5-year plan, far more than the Republicans were calling for. When Clinton left office the Pentagon had over a half trillion dollars in the major weapons procurement pipeline, not counting the ballistic missile defense systems, a pure boondoggle that cost over $71 billion by 1999. The dilemma, as both CIA and senior Clinton officials correctly warned, was that terrorists were more likely to strike the American homeland than some nation against which the military could retaliate. This fundamental disparity between hardware and reality has always existed and September 11, 2001 showed how vulnerable and weak the U.S. has become, a theme readers can explore in my new book, *Another Century of War?*

The war in Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999 brought to a head the future of NATO and the alliance, and especially Washington's deepening anxiety regarding Germany's possible independent role in Europe. Well before Bush took office, the Clinton Administration resolved never again to allow its allies to inhibit or define its strategy. Bush's policies, notwithstanding the brutal way in which they have been expressed or implemented, follow directly and logically from this crucial decision.

But the world today is increasingly dangerous for the U. S. More nations have nuclear weapons and means of delivering them; destructive small arms are much more abundant (thanks to swelling American arms exports which grew from 32 percent of the world trade in 1987 to 43 percent in 1997); there are more local and civil wars than ever, especially in regions like Eastern Europe which had not experienced any for nearly a half-century; and there is terrorism – the poor and weak man's ultimate weapon – on a scale that has never existed. The political, economic, and cultural causes of instability and conflict are growing, and expensive weapons are irrelevant – save to the balance sheets of those who make them.

So long as the future is to a large degree – to paraphrase Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld – "unknowable" it is not in the national interest of America's traditional allies to perpetuate the relationships created from 1945 to 1990. Through ineptness and a vague ideology of American power that acknowledges no limits on its global ambitions, the Bush Administration has lunged into unilateralist initiatives that discount consultations with its friends, much less the United Nations. The outcome has been serious erosion of the alliance system upon which U. S. foreign policy from 1947 onwards was based. With the proliferation of destructive weaponry and growing political instability, the world is becoming increasingly dangerous – and so is membership in alliances.

If Bush is reelected then the international order may be very different in 2008 than it is today, much less in 1999. All the same, there is no reason to believe that objective assessments of the costs and consequences of its actions will significantly alter America's foreign policy pri-

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orities over the next four years. If the Democrats win they will attempt, in the name of "progressive internationalism", to reconstruct the alliance system as it existed before the Yugoslav war of 1999, when the Clinton Administration turned against the veto powers built into NATO's structure. There is important bipartisan support for resurrecting the Atlanticism that Bush is in the process of smashing, and it was best reflected in the Council on Foreign Relations' vague and banal March 2004 report on the "transatlantic alliance", which Henry Kissinger helped direct and which both influential Republicans and Wall Street leaders endorsed.

Traditional elites are desperate to see NATO and the Atlantic system restored to their old glory. Their vision, premised on the expansionist assumptions that have guided American foreign policy since 1945, was best articulated the same month in a new book, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership,* by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was Carter's National Security adviser. Brzezinski rejects the Bush Administration's counterproductive rhetoric that so alienates former and potential future allies. But he regards American power as central to stability in every part of world and his global vision no less ambitious than the Bush Administration's. He is for the U.S. maintaining "a comprehensive technological edge over all potential rivals" and calls for the transformation of "America's prevailing power into a co-optive hegemony – one in which leadership is exercised more through shared conviction with enduring allies than by assertive domination". Precisely because it is much more salable to past and potential allies, this traditional Democratic vision is far more dangerous than that of the inept, eccentric melange now guiding American foreign policy.

But vice-president Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and the neoconservatives and eclectic hawks in Bush's administration are oblivious to the consequences of their recommendations or the way they shock America's overseas friends. Many of the President's key advisers possess aggressive, essentially academic geopolitical visions that assume overwhelming, decisive American military and economic power. Eccentric interpretations of Holy Scripture inspire yet others, including Bush himself. Most of these crusaders employ an amorphous nationalist rhetoric that makes it impossible to predict exactly how Bush will mediate between very diverse, often quirky influences, though thus far he has favored advocates of wanton use of Americna military might throughout the world. No one close to the President acknowledges the limits of its power – limits that are political and, as Korea and Vietnam proved, military too.

Kerry voted for many of Bush's key foreign and domestic measures and he is, at best, an indifferent candidate. His statements and interviews over the past months dealing with foreign affairs have mostly been both vague and incoherent, though he is explicitly and ardently pro-Israel and explicitly for regime-change in Venezuela. On Iraq, even as violence there escalated and Kerry finally had a crucial issue with which to win the election, his position has been indistinguishable from the President's. His statements on domestic policy so far are contradictory, complex, and utterly lacking in voter appeal. He is, to his core, an ambitious patrician educated in elite schools and anything but a populist. Kerry is neither articulate nor impressive as a candidate or as someone who is able to formulate an alternative to Bush's foreign and defense policies which themselves still have far more in common with Clinton's than they have differences. To be critical of Bush is scarcely justification for wishful thinking about Kerry, although every presidential election produces such illusions. Since 1947 the foreign and military policy goals of Democrats and Republicans have been essentially consensual, while there have been significant differences in the way they were expressed.

Inadvertently, the Bush Administration has begun to destroy an alliance system that for the world's peace should have been abolished long ago. The Democrats are far less likely to continue that process.

THE STAKES FOR THE WORLD

Critics of American foreign policy will not rule Washington after this election regardless of who wins. As dangerous as he is, Bush's reelection is much more likely to produce the continued destruction of the alliance system that is so crucial to American power in the long run. Facts in no way imply moral judgments if we merely identify them. One does not have to believe that "worse is better" but we have to consider candidly the foreign policy consequences of a renewal of Bush's mandate, not the least because it is likely. Given the choices, I am not voting.

Bush's policies have managed to alienate innumerable nations. Even America's firmest allies – such as Britain, Australia, and Canada – are compelled to ask themselves if issuance of blank checks to Washington is in their national interest or if it undermines the tenure of parties in power. Foreign affairs, as the terrorism in Madrid dramatically showed in March, are volatile as political dynamite to permit uncritical endorsement of American policies. Politicians who support such policies have been highly vulnerable to criticism from the opposition and from dissidents within their own ranks. Parties in power can pay dearly, as in Spain, where the people were always overwhelmingly opposed to entering the war and the ruling party snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. More important, in terms of cost and price are the innumerable victims among the people. The nations that have supported the Iraq war enthusiastically, particularly Great Britain, Italy,

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the Netherlands, and Australia, have made their populations especially vulnerable to terrorism. They now have the expensive responsibility of protecting them – if they can.

The Washington-based Pew Research Center report on public opinion released on March 16, 2004 showed that a large and rapidly increasing majority of the French, Germans, and even British want an independent European foreign policy. The number reached 75 percent in France in March 2004, compared to 60 percent two years earlier. The U.S. "favorability rating" plunged to 38 percent in France and Germany. But even in Britain it fell from 75 to 58 percent and the proportion of Britain's population who supported the decision to go to war in Iraq dropped from 61 percent in May 2003 to 43 percent in March 2004. Blair's domestic credibility is at its nadir. Right after the political debacle in Spain the president of Poland, where a majority of the people has always been opposed to sending troops to Iraq or keeping them there, complained that Washington "misled" him on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and hinted that Poland might withdraw its 2,400 troops from Iraq earlier than previously scheduled. Leaders of the main Italian opposition have already declared they will withdraw the 3,000 Italian troops in Iraq if they win the spring 2006 elections – a promise they are using in European Parliament elections this June. The issue now is whether nations like Poland, Italy, or The Netherlands can afford to isolate themselves from the major European powers and their own public opinion to remain a part of the increasingly quixotic and unilateralist American-led "coalition of the willing". The political liabilities of remaining close to Washington are obvious, the advantages non-existent.

What has happened in Spain is probably a harbinger of the future, further isolating the American government in its adventures. The Bush Administration sought to unite nations behind the Iraq War with a gargantuan lie – that Hussein had "weapons of mass destruction" – and failed spectacularly. Meanwhile, terrorism is more robust than ever and its arguments have far more credibility in the Muslim world. The Iraq War energized Al Qaeda and extremism and has tied down America, dividing its alliances as never before. Conflict in Iraq may escalate, as it has since March, creating a protracted armed conflict with Shiites and Sunnis that could last many months, even years. Will the nations that have sent troops there keep them there indefinitely, as Washington is increasingly likely to ask them to do? Can the political leaders afford concession to insatiable American demands?

Elsewhere, Washington opposes the major European nations on Iran, in part because the neoconservatives and realists within its own ranks are deeply divided, and the same is true of its relations with Japan, South Korea, and China on how to deal with North Korea. America's effort to assert its moral and ideological superiority, crucial elements in its postwar hegemony, is failing – badly.

America's justification for its attack on Iraq compelled France and Germany to become far more independent on foreign policy, far earlier, than they had intended or were prepared to do. In a way that was inconceivable two years ago NATO's future role is now being questioned. Europe's future defense arrangements are today an open question but there will be some sort of European military force independent of NATO and American control. Germany and France strongly oppose the Bush doctrine of preemption. Tony Blair, however much he intends to continue acting as a proxy for the U.S. on military questions, must return Britain to the European project, and his willingness since late 2003 to emphasize his nation's role in Europe reflects political necessities. To do otherwise is to alienate his increasingly powerful neighbors and risk losing elections.

Even more dangerous, the Bush Administration has managed to turn what was in the mid-1990s a blossoming cordial friendship with the former Soviet Union into an increasingly tense relationship. Despite a 1997 non-binding American pledge not to station substantial numbers of combat troops in the territories of new members, NATO last March incorporated seven East European nations and is now on Russia's very borders and Washington is in the process of establishing an undetermined but significant number of bases in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Russia has stated repeatedly that U.S. encirclement requires that it remain a military superpower and modernize its delivery systems so that it will be more than a match for the increasingly expensive and ambitious missile defense system and space weapons the Pentagon is now building. It has 5,286 nuclear warheads and 2,922 inter-continental ballistic missiles to deliver them. We now see a dangerous and costly renewal of the arms race.

In February of this year, because it regards America's ambitions in the former Soviet bloc as provocation, Russia threatened to pull out of the crucial Conventional Forces in Europe treaty,

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which has yet to come into force. "I would like to remind the representatives of [NATO]", Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov told a security conference in Munich last February, "that with its expansion they are beginning to operate in the zone of vitally important interests of our country…." And by increasingly acting unilaterally without United Nations authority, where Russia's veto power on the Security Council is, in Ivanov's wistful words –one of the "major factors for ensuring global stability", the U.S. has made international relations "very dangerous." (See Wade Boese, "Russia, NATO at Loggerheads Over Military Bases," *Arms Control Today*, March, 2004; *Los Angeles Times,* March 26, 2004.) The question Washington's allies will ask themselves is whether their traditional alliances have far more risks than benefits – and if they are now necessary.

In the case of China, Bush's key advisers were publicly committed to constraint of its burgeoning military and geopolitical power. But China's military budget is growing rapidly – 12 per cent this coming year – and the European Union wants to lift its 15-year old arms embargo and get a share of the enticingly large market. The Bush Administration, of course, is strongly resisting any relaxation of the export ban. Establishing bases on China's western borders is the logic of its ambitions.

By installing bases in small or weak Eastern European and Central Asian nations the United States is not so much engaged in "power projection" against an amorphously defined terrorism as again confronting Russia and China in an open-ended context. Such confrontations may have profoundly serious and protracted consequences neither America's allies nor its own people have any inclination to support. Even some Pentagon analysts (see for example, Dr. Stephen J. Blank's "Toward a New U.S. Strategy in Asia", *U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute*, February 24, 2004) have warned against this strategy because any American attempt to save failed states in the Caucasus or Central Asia, implicit in its new obligations, will risk exhausting what are ultimately its finite military resources. The political crisis now wracking Uzbekistan makes this fear very real.

The United States will only become more prudent internationally when it is constrained by a lack of allies. And the world will be a far safer place.

There is no way to predict what emergencies will arise or what these commitments entail, either for the U. S. or its allies, not the least because – as Iraq proved last year and Vietnam long before it – America's intelligence on the capabilities and intentions of possible enemies against which it blares its readiness to "preempt" is so utterly faulty. Without accurate information a state can believe and do anything, and this is the predicament the Bush Administration's allies are in. It is simply not to their national interest, much less to the political interests of those now in power or the security of their people, to pursue foreign policies based on a blind, uncritical acceptance of fictions or flamboyant adventurism founded on false premises and information. Such acceptance is far too open-ended, both in terms of potential time and in the political costs involved. If Bush is reelected, America's allies and friends will have to confront such stark choices, a painful process that will redefine and probably shatter existing alliances. Many nations, including the larger, powerful ones, will embark on independent, realistic foreign policies, and the dramatic events in Spain have reinforced this likelihood.

But the United States will be more prudent, and the world will be far safer, only if it is constrained by a lack of allies and isolated.

And that is happening. CP

Gabriel Kolko, research professor emeritus at York University in Toronto, is our preeminent historian of modern war. His his most recent book, *Another Century of War?*, was published last year by The New Press.