

An “April Fool” in Baghdad? John McCain

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[Eleven years ago] On April Fool’s Day, 1st April, [2007] Senator John McCain went for a stroll in Baghdad’s central, sprawling Shorja Market. There were “encouraging signs”, he said “progress” was “evident”.

The man whose 2004 book is entitled: “Why Courage Matters – The Way to a Braver Life”, wore body armour and was reported as accompanied by one hundred soldiers, three Blackhawk helicopters and two Apaches. The Iraq debate in Congress “has an Alice in Wonderland quality about it”, he comments on his website (<http://www.mccain.senate.gov>). So did his market visit, where the “warm” people even refused money for his “souvenirs”. Probably because a very proud people would not take an invasion supporter’s cash if it was the last on the planet.

“Never have I been able to go out into the city as I did today”, said McCain. “Never (before) have I been able to drive from the airport.” Wonder what air cover and armoured battalions accompanied that twenty minute jolly. Commentator Norman Solomon compared the comments to Robert McNamara in Viet Nam in 1962: “Nothing but progress and hopeful indications of further progress in the future ...”

“On March 28th, 2007, McCain claimed that ‘General Petraeus goes out in Baghdad almost daily in an unarmed humvee.’” On March 29th., CNN’s John Roberts stated that he “...checked with General Petraeus’s people overnight and they said he never goes out in anything but an up-armoured humvee.”

Further, Retired General Barry McCaffrey, on the same day, issued a report saying “... no Iraqi government official, coalition soldier, diplomat, reporter could walk the streets without heavily armed protection.” (Wikipedia.)

McCain later said he had “misspoken” re the peace and tranquility of downtown Baghdad. There are other more apt words. In February, one hundred and thirty seven people were killed in bombings at Shorja market, which has been targeted on a number of occasions and where, prior to the invasion, one wandered amongst the wares without a thought of danger.

Americans were not getting the “full picture” of progress, McCain had said of his tooled up roam. In fact more than six hundred Iraqis had been killed since just 25th March. And on the day of McCain’s souvenir stroll, Joost Hiltermann of the Brussels based International Crisis Group doubted there would be “a serious drop in casualties”, without a more imaginative approach, “surge” or not. In all, a minimum of two thousand and seventy eight Iraqis were

killed in March, up fifteen percent on February, according to figures obtained by AFP. On 22nd March, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon ducked, flinched and fled as two powerful explosions hit the heavily fortified Green Zone, he too had been telling his audience of hopeful signs and progress.

The Senator, a 2008 Presidential hopeful, seemingly has a vested interest in painting a rosy picture of the bloody hell to which the US led invasion has reduced Iraq. His unwavering support for the Iraq war might seem to show a lack of judgment, similar to the present White House incumbent, of whom the majority of Americans – and a large part of the world – have had enough. His 2002 book, written with Harlan Ullman is entitled: “Unfinished Business: Afghanistan, Middle East and Beyond – Defusing Dangers that threaten American Security”. The unmitigated disaster of Afghanistan and Iraq have done anything but “defuse dangers”; they are insane undertakings of near unprecedented wickedness and slaughter that has brought near universal loathing on the United States and Britain. Further, this week, the respected think tank The Oxford Research Group published “Beyond Terror: The Truth About the Real Threats to Our World”. This major academic study, endorsed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, warns that the “war on terror” is increasing the likelihood of more attacks of the magnitude of September 11th.

The Report, which calls for the rapid withdrawal of troops from Iraq, also advocates a system of “sustainable security” where governments co-operate to tackle the root causes of division, rather than resort to brute force. An outbreak of sanity far from “defusion” at gun, tank and bomb point.

McCain, however, is seemingly determined to fight on in Iraq to the last drop of others’ blood and apparently has interests in the Middle East further to the West. On December 5th 2006, he was awarded the Henry Jackson Distinguished Service Award, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA.) With the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) the most strongly supportive of the war on Iraq. JINSA: “The most influential group on the issue of US-Israeli military relations” exists: “To inform the (US) defence and foreign affairs community about the important role Israel can and does play in bolstering democratic interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.” (That old aspiration: “From the Nile to the Euphrates” comes to mind.)

Advisory Members have included a “who’s who” of invasion designer neo-cons, such as Richard Perle, Dick Cheney, John Bolton, Douglas Feith and Michael Ledeen. Supporters include another “whose who”, the defence industry from Lockheed Martin to General Dynamics and Friends of the Israeli Defence Force are also included in an enlightening list of funders.(see: <http://rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/1508>) “United States and Israeli interests are largely one and the same”, concludes rightweb.

The day John McCain went souvenir hunting and “misspoke” regarding Baghdad’s tranquility, a glimpse of reality that day in Baghdad follows: Four mortar shells hit Dora district, four injured; a mortar shell in Yarmouk, three injured; sixteen unidentified bodies were found between Amil, Dora, Yarmouk, Mansour, Huraih and Bab al-Muadam; six US soldiers killed by roadside bombs and another wounded two civilians in eastern Baghdad. Gunmen wounded two children in a playing field in Zafaraniya. The list for the rest of the country, north, south, east, west is another day of unspeakable carnage running to four tightly packed pages. (courtesy Dancewater, Iraq Today: <http://www.uruknet.de/?p=m31808&s1=hl>)

“Benefits of success will justify the costs and risks”, McCain told The New School, Madison Square Garden in May 2006 to jeers, boos and insults after twelve hundred graduates had signed a petition objecting to his being invited to give the graduation address. “Costs and risks?” Not to the Senator, surrounded by near gladiatorial security. A Senator who, in the 2000 Presidential primaries, said of the Vietnamese – in another invasion America had no right to undertake: “I hate gooks, I will hate them as long as I live ... this is the kindest description I can give to them.” I wonder what he calls the Iraqis? And I wonder – who was the April Fool?

(Footnote: To be fair, one must respect the fact that Senator McCain spent five and a half years in a North Vietnamese prison camp. This would naturally affect his views, especially of Vietnam. You’d think McCain’s experience would have led him to speak out for those who spend five years in Guantánamo as well as the thousands in Iraq and Afghanistan at the hands of his countrymen. Please see:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McCain#P.O.W._McCain)

Felicity Arbuthnot who contributes regularly to Global Research is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She has written and broadcast on Iraq, her coverage of which was nominated for several awards. She was also senior researcher for John Pilger’s award-winning documentary “Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq” and author, with Nikki van der Gaag, of “[Baghdad” in the “Great Cities” series, for World Almanac Books \(2006.\)](#) See also:[Beyond Terror: The Truth About the Real Threats to Our World](#)

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