let's go back some 20 years. Ronald Reagan was president. George Shultz was secretary of state. Lebanon was in turmoil. And Iraq and Iran were locked in a vicious war that had sharply curtailed the flow of oil out of Iraq.

In December 1983 Donald Rumsfeld was sent to the Middle East as a special envoy in an effort to jump-start the peace process in Lebanon and advance a presidential initiative for peace between Arabs and Israelis.

One of his stops was Baghdad, where he met with Saddam Hussein. That was unusual. Mr. Rumsfeld was the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit Iraq since 1967, when Iraq and other Arab nations severed relations with the U.S., which they blamed for Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War.

The primary goal of Mr. Rumsfeld’s visit to Baghdad was to improve relations with Iraq. But another matter was also quietly discussed. The powerful Bechtel Group in San Francisco, of which Secretary Shultz had been president before joining the Reagan administration, wanted to build an oil pipeline from Iraq to the Jordanian port of Aqaba, near the Red Sea. It was a billion-dollar project and the U.S. government wanted Saddam to sign off on it.

This remains, two decades later, a touchy subject. When I brought the matter up last week with James Placke, who in 1983 was a deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, he said, “My memory on that is kind of foggy.”

But at the mention of Bechtel, he said: “Ahh, now you’ve said the magic word. Now I remember. Bechtel was promoting it.”

Bechtel was promoting it and the Middle East peace envoy, Donald Rumsfeld, was pushing it with top Iraqi officials. A previously classified State Department memo that is contained in a report on the pipeline by the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington described how Mr.

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Cronyism and Rebuilding

Editorial

The Bush administration began handing out private contracts Monday to build water treatment systems, airports, bridges and other foundations of what President Bush envisions as a “peaceful and prosperous Iraq.” The director of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Andrew Natsios, called it “the largest disaster relief response we have ever put together.”

No kidding. Since this nation’s ultimate victory in the region rides less on the accuracy of its munitions than on whether it lives up to its stated ideals, the importance of the rebuilding effort can’t be overstated.

The long-term battle to help Iraq is off to a bad start, however, with close U.S. allies like Britain fuming that the Bush administration has failed to involve them in the postwar reconstruction planning since in a secret process last month it invited a select group of U.S. corporations to bid for the tens of billions of dollars in work. The contracts, critics allege, could let the U.S. victors horde the spoils.

The five companies that submitted bids -- Kellogg, Brown & Root, a division of Halliburton Co., the firm once headed by Vice President Dick Cheney; Bechtel Group Inc.; Fluor Corp.; Parsons Corp.; and Louis Berger Group Inc. -- gave $2.8 million in political donations from 1999 to 2002, 68% to Republicans and 32% to Democrats, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

It’s no surprise that Chris Patten, the European Union’s external affairs minister, condemned the administration’s slighting of European contractors such as ABB Ltd. and Siemens as “exceptionally maladroit.”

The most worrying complaint comes from nongovernmental organizations that have been crucial to rebuilding Afghanistan but that so far have been shut out of any meaningful role in rebuilding Iraq. Take Oxfam, for instance. The relief group says U.S. officials have yet to grant it a license to operate in Iraq, even though it requested one in October. Oxfam has international legitimacy because it is not allied with national or partisan politics and has done humanitarian work successfully after wars in Afghanistan, Bosnia and southern Africa.

If Congress doesn’t pressure the Bush administration to open up bidding and involvement in postwar construction to a wide array of the best-qualified groups, it will not have a chance to do so later. That’s because the contracts give the primary contractors an extraordinary level of authority to choose subcontractors and others who will share in the work and the money to be made -- from rebuilding Iraq.

It’s fine if rebuilding Iraq brings money back into the U.S. economy. But the Bush administration and Congress should also use the contracts as tools to revive some of the global alliances demolished in the run-up to war. As the administration sets forth its plans to rebuild Iraq, it should be keenly aware that the world is watching. The awarding of contracts must be seen as fair, with no bias toward domestic political friends, and based on which companies and groups can do the job well. The right reconstruction effort not only will help the people of Iraq start anew, it will be a tool to help repair frayed international relationships.
Television Agendas Shape Images of War

(Continued from page 1)

“catter”, “catarrh”, “cttr”) for the majority of the event.

[...] There is a daily routine fast emerging on the all-news networks, and it kicked in properly from about 8:45 a.m., after Tony Blair’s Commons appearance was widely covered. There was a swift shuffling between Pentagon correspondents, anchors in Kuwait, retired generals pacing around vast models of the theatre of war, uneventful footage from fixed cameras in Baghdad and - above all - interviews with the sand-caked “embeds”.

Embedding has been an astounding PR coup for the Pentagon. The reporters use the words “we” and “us” profusely, identifying themselves with the military, and while this has prompted concerns regarding objectivity among US commentators, it is not surprising, given their very personal stake in their units’ success.

Everyone went live to the president’s rousing speech in Florida, coverage of which reached past 11 a.m. CNN led the field in presenting a range of other perspectives, interviewing, through the course of the morning, the Russian foreign minister, Igor Ivanov, who put the case against the war, and the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, who discussed the root causes of terrorism.

Kofi Annan appeared briefly, expressing concern about civilian casualties.

As noon arrived, WETA was broadcasting a show featuring lion puppets.

Al-Jazeera, Qatari-based satellite station

by Ian Black

Al-Jazeera is the most independent TV station in the Arab world and it promises to give its viewers “the full picture”. On day seven of the Iraq war its rolling news coverage tried hard to do that, broadcasting harrowing images of victims on both sides.

Pictures from yesterday’s attack in the Shaab area of Baghdad led its bulletins for hours, the camera lingering on the splayed, naked legs of a corpse lying by a burned-out car, the upper half of the body covered by a sheet.

Bystanders wanted to show what had been done by US and British missiles, so one lifted the shirt masking the bloody face of another corpse. And there was a long still shot of a lump of flesh half buried in the ruins.

Later, confirming the Qatar-based channel’s reputation for exclusives, it showed footage of what it said were the bodies of two British soldiers, in blood-stained camouflage uniforms, reportedly killed in fighting for Zubayr.

Adnan Sharif, the moustached, middle-aged Palestinian reading the news, was professional throughout, maintaining Al-Jazeera’s tradition of telling it straight.

Correspondents in the field have more leeway, with live pieces highlighting the suffering of the civilian population in the south. Its man in Basra, Mohammed al-Abdallah, was firm. “The streets are very calm and there are no indications of violence or riots,” he reported.

Omar al-Issawi, at central command HQ, provided detailed military analysis. “The Israelis got to Beirut quickly in 1982,” he observed in a sharp live two-way, “but they had the city under siege for nearly two months.”

[...] Al-Jazeera’s War in Iraq set is dominated by the US and Iraqi flags and a large map. Like CNN, it has a stock market and currency exchange ticker, and newsflashes along the bottom of the screen.

Its language is careful. American and British troops are referred to as “invading forces”, not the “forces of aggression” used by Iraq and other Arab channels.

Where it differs from western stations is the balletic collage of file pictures used between bulletins, set to a rhythmic soundtrack. These are Apocalypse Now-inspired juxtapositions of a B-52 taking off, a tearful toddler with bandaged head, flames leaping against an orange Baghdad sky, tired American soldiers: war as performance art.

[...] Al-Jazeera is making a hero out of Ali Abed Minkash, a peasant who reportedly shot down a US Apache helicopter near Kerbala and who was repeatedly shown standing proudly with his ancient rifle.

Another Iraqi who gets a lot of Al-Jazeera airtime is the minister of information, Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, his press conferences dubbed into Arabic from his many BBC appearances.

Adnan Sharif and his colleague Rima Salha also presented clips of Mr Blair in the Commons, comment from London correspondent Yusri Fouda, George Bush in Florida, anti-war demonstrations across the world - and Colin Powell refusing to comment on what happened in Baghdad yesterday morning.

British 24-hour television

by Matt Wells

At the time of the last Gulf war in 1991 there was only one 24-hour news channel based in Britain: Sky News, only two years old, was light-weight and irrelevant.

Now there are three, available to the 40% of households who have signed up to multi-channel television. According to recent viewing figures, the nation is transfixed.

It is easy to see why: this is not just war, it is live from the frontline. Just before 6 p.m. Sky’s Ross Appleyard came on air from a mobile phone as he cowered beneath a car when his division came under mortar attack from Iraqi positions near Nassiriya in southern Iraq.

Half an hour earlier the BBC’s Clive Myrie gave a dramatic account of a coalition bombardment of a 100-strong column of Iraqi troop vehicles leaving Basra.

From the bombing in Baghdad to the battle in Najaf and the continuing confusion over the supposed popular revolt in Basra, there was plenty of speculation, but precious few hard facts yesterday.

None of the three British broadcast news organizations has correspondents inside any of the big Iraqi cities - apart from Baghdad - that were the subject of intense fighting during the day; all were reliant upon information supplied by correspondents traveling with the coalition military.

While there are stylistic differences between the three networks: Sky, BBC News 24 and the ITV News Channel, they all occupy the same part of the news spectrum. All have broadly similar news agendas and correspondents in the same places.

[...] There was a divergence when it emerged that al-Jazeera had pictures that apparently showed two dead British soldiers and two prisoners of war; Sky News showed the images of the PoWs, although it backed away from the more grisly pictures of the dead soldiers. The other networks held back.

All make attempts at detachment: reports from “embedded” correspondents

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and those based in Baghdad are enveloped with health warnings, claims of casualties are covered in caves, and briefings from Qatar and Baghdad are shrouded in healthy skepticism.

But, perhaps inevitably, the perspective of all three channels is determinedly western. This becomes even more obvious on an analysis of the most frequent location of live two-way interviews: coalition command in Doha, military headquarters in Kuwait, the White House in Washington and Downing Street in London.

Jerusalem, Amman, Cairo and Riyadh have barely had a look-in.

**Iraqi television**

by Sean Smith in Baghdad and Brian Whitaker

Surprising as it may seem, Iraqi state television is scarcely covering the war, perhaps because it realizes many Iraqis get their information from elsewhere, especially foreign satellite channels.

When mention of the war becomes unavoidable, Iraqi television eschews blood-and-guts images of the kind shown by al-Jazeera, preferring carefully stage-managed interviews with hospitalized victims who invariably praise Saddam Hussein and/or condemn the Americans.

But the station’s main role is to show uplifting, morale-boosting programs. Much of the time this consists of music - not necessarily martial music, although the songs always pay tribute to President Saddam. Sometimes, as happened yesterday afternoon, a singer is seen performing in front of a statue of the president, or in a similar location where the message is obvious.

If it is a studio performance there are background images of the president as a young man, as an older man, firing a gun, or addressing crowds. There are even occasional flashbacks to last year’s national referendum that allegedly re-elected him as president unanimously.

Children often appear in these scenes, showing adoration for the great man.

The music is tailored to several types of audience. Sometimes there are formal choirs singing in the old Soviet style but with Arabic musical touches.

Alternatively, tribesmen sing in traditional dress, to accompany a man doing a sword dance. As a more militaristic variant of the theme, the tribesmen are from time to time shown dancing with Kalashnikovs in their hands.

For “younger” viewers (probably those under about 45) there are rather staid Iraqi pop singers who also pay tribute to President Saddam.

**Ultimate Insiders**

(Continued from page 1)

Rumsfeld broached the subject during a private meeting with Iraq’s foreign minister, Tariq Aziz.

The memo, from Mr. Rumsfeld, said: “I raised the question of a pipeline through Jordan. He said he was familiar with the proposal. It apparently was a U. S. company’s proposal. However, he was concerned about the proximity to Israel as the pipeline would enter the Gulf of Aqaba.”

The Iraqis were afraid the Israelis might destroy the pipeline. “I said I could understand that there would need to be some sort of arrangement that would give those involved confidence that it would not be easily vulnerable,” Mr. Rumsfeld wrote in the memo. He added, parenthetically: “This may be an issue to raise with Israel at the appropriate time.”

It was known by the fall of 1983 that Iraq had used chemical weapons against Iran. That did not prevent the U.S. from pursuing improved relations with Saddam, or curb the enthusiasm for the Aqaba pipeline - a project promoted by a company that had given the Reagan administration not just its secretary of state, but also its secretary of defense, Caspar Weinberger, who had been Bechtel’s general counsel.

No one seemed concerned about weaving these obvious conflicts of interest into the peace process in the most volatile region of the world.

Mr. Shultz said he recused himself from anything having to do with the pipeline. But it was his State Department that had joined with Bechtel to push the project, and everyone knew that Mr. Shultz had run Bechtel.

Saddam ultimately gave a thumbs down to the pipeline proposal. “It didn’t seem to make very good commercial sense,” said Mr. Placke, “and ultimately I think it failed on those grounds.”

The efforts to promote peace in the Middle East also failed. Now, 20 years later, Mr. Shultz (who is currently on the board of Bechtel) and Mr. Rumsfeld are among the fiercest of the war hawks. They wanted war with Iraq and they got it.

Their philosophical flights in favor of the war would seem more graceful, and much less unsavory, if they weren’t flying with the baggage of Bechtel and other large commercial interests that have so much to gain from the war.

This unilateral war and the ouster of Saddam have given the hawks and their commercial allies carte blanche in Iraq. And the company with perhaps the sleekest and most effective of all the inside tracks, a company that is fairly panting with anticipation over oil and reconstruction contracts worth scores of billions of dollars, is of course the Bechtel Group of San Francisco.

**The Cost of War**

From: True Majority Action Center

Former admirals, generals and military officials agree that the U.S. can safely reduce the Pentagon budget by 15%. That’s enough to do ALL of the following:

- Provide basic health and food to the world’s poor: $12 billion
- Rebuild America’s public schools over 10 years: $12 billion
- Reduce class size for grades 1-3 to 15 students per class: $11 billion
- Reduce debts of impoverished nations: $10 billion
- Provide health insurance to all uninsured American kids: $6 billion
- Increase federal funding for clean energy and energy efficiency: $6 billion
- Public financing of all federal elections: $1 billion
- Fully fund Head Start: $2 billion

This article is especially pertinent because the Bechtel Group is a major financial contributor to Caltech. Stephen D. Bechtel, Jr., Chairman Emeritus of the Bechtel Group, is also a senior member of Caltech’s board of trustees. We feel that Bechtel’s policies are inimical to the Institute’s mission, and we urge President Baltimore to refuse any further Bechtel funding.