US Policy vs. Reality
The following excerpts from three different news stories illustrate the difficulties in building a true Iraqi democracy that is simultaneously supportive of US interests in the region.

“Freedom, American Style”
LA Times 04/23/03 by Roger Morris

Washington has rarely been adept, or candid, in fostering authentic democracy. Almost nowhere in half a century—from 1950s’ CIA coups in Iran, Guatemala and Congo, among other places, to expeditions into the Caribbean, Africa and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s—has regime change left a nation freer. Not even Germany and Japan. The CIA colluded with ex-Nazis in Bonn to fix the rule of a Cold War ally, and covert manipulation entrenched a corporate oligarchy in Tokyo. In the latest case in point, Afghanistan, politics have reverted to the old warlord feudalism. U.S. forces barely venture beyond bases stillrocked by Al Qaeda.

“The United States has no interest, absolutely no interest, in ruling Iraq,” said Zalmay Khalidzad, a White House aide who was also Bush’s envoy to post-Taliban Afghanistan. But history says different: U.S. arms and aid for propping up an Iraqi monarchy in the 1950s. CIA-backed coups in 1963 and 1968, one bringing in the Baathists and the second bringing in Hussein himself. The Gulf War. Now its sequel. Five times in a generation, Washington intervened to ensure that Iraq did not defy U.S. interests.

In one of the most fiercely anti-colonial, Arab nationalist states—hatred of foreign domination the sole cause uniting Shiites, Sunnis

US Military Reveals Its Priorities in Iraq
Agence France Presse, 04/16/03

Since US forces rolled into central Baghdad a week ago, one of the sole public buildings untouched by looters has been Iraq’s massive oil ministry, which is under round-the-clock surveillance by troops.

The imposing tile-colored building in the Al-Mustariya quarter is guarded by around 50 US tanks which block every entrance, while sharpshooters are positioned on the roof and in the windows.

The curious onlooker is clearly unwelcome. Any motorist who drifts within a few meters (yards) of the main entrance is told to leave immediately.

Baghdad residents have complained that US troops should do more to protect against the looters, most of them Shiite Muslims repressed by Saddam Hussein’s Sunni-dominated regime who live in the vast slum known as Saddam City on the

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Taking Freedom For Granted?

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• Why should I care about the provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act and other Administration actions impacting civil liberties?

The Bush Administration claims that the erosion of civil liberties post-9/11 is necessary to advance the “war on terrorism.” However, Congress has not issued a declaration of war. The Administration has not defined an identifiable enemy, has not named an enemy-state, and has not given the American public a benchmark to determine when the “war” has ended. Under this rubric, the Administration’s encroachments on civil liberties can be continued forever.

Some citizens argue, “If I’m not doing anything wrong, then I don’t have anything to worry about.” But, who decides what conduct is “wrong”? In antiterror legislation and Executive Orders, the Administration has the capacity to decide what conduct is “wrong,” without Congressional oversight, without public input, and without judicial review. Under this structure, Americans have no assurance that the exercise of free speech or political dissent will not become prohibited conduct.

Draconian detention sweeps and reporting measures imposed on immigrants to our country from the Middle East and South Asia are reminiscent of the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II and black-listing during the McCarthy era. Our nation is repeating the shameful errors from our past. We must act now so that we don’t look back on this, the post-9/11 era, with shame as well.

The trade-off between civil liberties and security is a false choice. The exercise of civil liberties does not increase the likelihood of terrorist acts. Likewise, the curtailment of civil liberties does not increase public safety.

• What emerging trends impact civil liberties during this post-9/11 era?
  1. Reduced judicial review of Administration actions.
  2. Limited Congressional oversight of Administration actions.
  3. Decreased publicly-available information about government activities.
  4. Increased surveillance over citizens’ private information without suspicion of crime.
  5. Increased federal control over state and local law enforcement.
  7. Melding of previously separated federal law enforcement and intelligence-gathering functions.
  8. Increased use of “emergency” legislation without sufficient public hearing and input.

US Reveals Its Priorities In Iraq

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nortern outskirts.

But while museums, banks, hotels and libraries have been ransacked, the oil ministry remains secure.

The symbolism is loaded, considering how vehemently the United States and Britain denied war opponents’ accusations that the campaign to oust Saddam was driven by oil lust.

“They came from the other side of the world. Do you believe they’re going to do much for me? They’ve just come for the oil, fumed Salam Mohammad Hassan, a doctor who lives near the ministry.

Residents noted that the irrigation ministry, just next-door, was torched...
Israel Seeks Pipeline for Iraqi Oil

US discusses plan to pump fuel to its regional ally and solve energy headache at a stroke
The Observer, 04/20/03 by Ed Vuillaume in Washington

Plans to build a pipeline to siphon oil from newly conquered Iraq to Israel are being discussed between Washington, Tel Aviv and potential future government figures in Baghdad.

The plan envisages the reconstruction of an old pipeline, inactive since the end of the British mandate in Palestine in 1948, when the flow from Iraq’s northern oilfields to Palestine was re-directed to Syria.

Now, its resurrection would transform economic power in the region, bringing revenue to the new US-dominated Iraq, cutting out Syria and solving Israel’s energy crisis at a stroke.

It would also create an end less and easily accessible source of cheap Iraqi oil for the US guaranteed by reliable allies other than Saudi Arabia—a keystone of US foreign policy for decades and especially since 11 September 2001.

Until 1948, the pipeline ran from the Kurdish-controlled city of Mosul to the Israeli port of Haifa, on its northern Mediterranean coast.

The revival of the pipeline was first discussed openly by the Israeli Minister for National Infrastructures, Joseph Paritzky, according to the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz.

The paper quotes Paritzky as saying that the pipeline would cut Israel’s energy bill drastically—probably by more than 25 per cent—since the country is currently largely dependent on expensive imports from Russia.

US intelligence sources confirmed to The Observer that the project has been discussed. One former senior CIA official said: ‘It has long been a dream of a powerful section of the people now driving this administration [of President George W. Bush] and the war in Iraq to safeguard Israel’s energy supply as well as that of the United States.

‘The Haifa pipeline was something that existed, was resurrected as a dream and is now a viable project - albeit with a lot of building to do.’

The editor-in-chief of the Middle East Economic Review, Walid Khadour, says in the current issue of Jane’s Foreign Report that ‘there’s not a metre of it left, at least in Arab territory’.

To resurrect the pipeline would need the backing of whatever government the US is to put in place in Iraq, and has been discussed—according to Western diplomatic sources—with the US-sponsored Iraqi National Congress and its leader Ahmed Chalabi, the former banker favoured by the Pentagon for a powerful role in the war’s aftermath.

Sources at the State Department said that concluding a peace treaty with Israel is to be ‘top of the agenda’ for a new Iraqi government, and Chalabi is known to have discussed Iraq’s recognition of the state of Israel.

The pipeline would also require permission from Jordan. Paritzky’s Ministry is believed to have approached officials in Amman on 9 April this year. Sources told Ha’aretz that the talks left Israel ‘optimistic’.

James Akins, a former US ambassador to the region and one of America’s leading Arabists, said: ‘There would be a fee for transit rights through Jordan, just as there would be fees for Israel from those using what would be the Haifa terminal.

‘After all, this is a new world order now. This is what things look like particularly if we wipe out Syria. It just goes to show that it is all about oil, for the United States and its ally.’

Akins was ambassador to Saudi Arabia before he was fired after a series of conflicts with then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, father of the vision to pipe oil west from Iraq. In 1975, Kissinger signed what forms the basis for the Haifa project: a Memorandum of Understanding whereby the US would guarantee Israel’s oil reserves and energy supply in times of crisis.

Kissinger was also master of the American plan in the mid-Eighties— when Saddam Hussein was a key US ally—to run an oil pipeline from Iraq to Aqaba in Jordan, opposite the Israeli port of Eilat.

The plan was promoted by the now Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and the pipeline was to be built by the Bechtel company, which the Bush administration last week awarded a multi-billion dollar contract for the reconstruction of Iraq.

The memorandum has been quietly renewed every five years, with special legislation attached whereby the US stocks a strategic oil reserve for Israel even if it entailed domestic shortages - at a cost of $3 billion (£1.9bn) in 2002 to US taxpayers.

This bill would be slashed by a new pipeline, which would have the added advantage of giving the US reliable access to Gulf oil other than from Saudi Arabia.

BBC Chief Attacks U.S. Media War Coverage

Reuters, 04/24/03 by Merissa Marr

U.S. broadcasters’ coverage of the Iraq war was so unquestioningly patriotic and so lacking in impartiality that it threatened the credibility of America’s electronic media, the head of the BBC said on Thursday.

“Personally, I was shocked while in the United States by how unquestioning the broadcast news media was during this war,” Dyke said in a speech at a University of London conference.

“If Iraq proved anything, it was that the BBC cannot afford to mix patriotism and journalism. This is happening in the United States and if it continues, will undermine the credibility of the U.S. electronic news media.”

Dyke singled out Fox News, the most popular U.S. cable news network during the conflict, for its “gung-ho patriotism,” saying: “We are still surprised when we see Fox News with such a committed political position.”

A spokesman for Fox News declined comment.

The British media veteran also attacked U.S. radio broadcaster Clear Channel and warned against British media becoming “Americanized.”

‘SHOCKED’ BROADCASTER INVOLVED IN RALLY

“We are genuinely shocked when we discover that the largest radio group in the United States was using its airwaves to organize pro-war rallies. We are even more shocked to discover that the same group wants to become a big player in radio in the United Kingdom when it is deregulated later this year,” Dyke said.

Officials for Clear Channel said that any pro-war rallies linked to the company have been organized by individuals, such as popular disc jockey Glenn Beck, or individual stations, rather than...
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and Kurds—Iraqi democracy will be at odds with U.S. policy at every turn. What if Iraq chooses a more independent oil policy, as a past regime did until overthrown by the U.S.? Or a Shiite majority rule takes Baghdad into an anti-U.S. alliance with Iran or other Islamic forces? Or Iraqis continue financing the Palestinian resistance, or adopt a more anti-Israeli policy? Or Iraq, among the most dynamic Arab societies with its own popular socialism, flouts the global capitalist canon? Or a freely elected Iraqi regime decides to rearm, or even rival a nuclear-armed Israel?

“Militants at the Crossroads”
The Nation 04/23/03 by Ari Z. Weisbard

Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer al-Hakim’s organization, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), claims some 10,000 trained members in its military arm, the Badr Brigade, and has a history of launching violent attacks against Saddam Hussein’s regime. Fawaz Gerges, a professor of International Affairs and Middle Eastern Studies at Sarah Lawrence, says the militant group could potentially become “the Hezbollah of Iraq.” Whether that potential is realized may depend on how the United States treats SCIRI during the next critical stages of forming an interim government.

Hakim says that he is poised to return to Iraq—and that it is time for the United States to leave. His group has already displayed its militancy by boycotting the Iraqi opposition conference that began on April 15, a stance some SCIRI officials took within hours of Saddam’s statue falling, charging that the meeting was “part of General [Jay] Garner’s rule of Iraq and we are not going to be part of that project at all.”

It’s worth noting, in the wake of these recent protests, that SCIRI was one of only six opposition groups—and one of just two Shiite groups—that the Bush Administration made eligible for $92 million in US military assistance last year. The other primarily Shiite group was the ethically challenged Ahmad Chalabi’s umbrella organization, the Iraqi National Congress.

For a group that has enjoyed US support, SCIRI has an uncomfortable amount in common with anti-Western Islamic fundamentalists: Iran provides much of the group’s financial backing and for more than twenty years provided refuge for Hakim. During a visit to Lebanon shortly after Israel withdrew its troops, according to the Hezbollah radio station Radio of Islam, Hakim used the occasion to congratulate “Hezbollah, the Islamic Resistance, and its mujahedeen for the great victory against the Zionist enemy.”

SCIRI has not only endorsed violent attacks carried out by Hezbollah; the organization has carried out its own violent resistance, from attacking political party headquarters and government buildings with hand grenades, automatic weapons, and hand-held missile launchers to planting a “high powered remotely controlled bomb” in an Iraqi security base, all according to its own website. Although such attacks may have been justified by the nature of Saddam’s regime, they also provide a precedent for how SCIRI might choose to oppose a prolonged American occupation.

“U.S. Planners Surprised by Strength of Iraqi Shiites”
Washington Post, 04/23/03 by Glenn Kessler and Dana Priest

As Iraqi Shiite demands for a dominant role in Iraq’s future mount, Bush administration officials say they underestimated the Shiites’ organizational strength and are unprepared to prevent the rise of an anti-American, Islamic fundamentalist government in the country.

The burst of Shiite power—as demonstrated by the hundreds of thousands who made a long-banned pilgrimage to the holy city of Karbala yesterday—as U.S. officials looking for allies in the struggle to fill the power vacuum left by the downfall of Saddam Hussein.

As the administration plotted to overthrow Hussein’s government, U.S. officials said this week, it failed to fully appreciate the force of Shiite aspirations and is now concerned that those sentiments could coalesce into a fundamentalist government. Some administration officials were dazzled by Ahmed Chalabi, the prominent Iraqi exile who is a Shiite and an advocate of a secular democracy. Others were more focused on the overriding goal of defeating Hussein and paid little attention to the dynamics of religion and politics in the region.

Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, a major strategic goal of the United States has been to contain radical Shiite fundamentalism. In the 1980s, the United States backed Hussein as a bulwark against Iran. But by this year, the drive to topple Hussein—who had suppressed Iraq’s Shiite majority for decades—loomed as a much more important objective for the administration.

Some U.S. intelligence analysts and Iraq experts said they warned the Bush administration before the war about vanquishing Hussein’s government without having anything to replace it. But officials said the concerns were either not heard or fell too low on the priority list of postwar planning.

BBC Attacks US War Coverage

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as a result of overall corporate policy. […]

John Hogan, president and chief executive officer of Clear Channel’s radio division, told Reuters: “to categorize this as a Clear Channel policy is just laughable.”

“Clear Channel Radio stations are operated locally. Local managers make their own decisions about programming and community events—including rallies to thank and support the men and women in their communities who are serving in the armed forces,” he said. […]

In terms of plans for investments in the U.K., Clear Channel said it has no investments in U.K. radio stations and has no immediate plans to change that. “The company is not currently in talks with anyone to purchase U.K. radio assets,” it said in a statement.

Dyke said, “For the health of our democracy, it’s vital we don’t follow the path of many American networks.”

U.S. broadcasters came under attack for “cheerleading” during the Iraq conflict, with some critics saw as gung-ho reporting and flag-waving patriotism. In one example, a U.S. network described U.S. soldiers as “heroes” and “liberators.” […]

Dyke defended the BBC in the face of accusations—some from the British government—that the broadcaster had been soft on Saddam Hussein's government.

“In times of war, British governments of every persuasion have sought to use the media to manage public opinion … It’s only a problem if the BBC caves in,” Dyke said.