

**THE BLOG**

Worse Than Libby

By Marty Kaplan

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Commuting Scooter's sentence wasn't the worst thing W did this week. Libby, after all, was just a bit player in the Bush-Cheney epic, a mere hit man deployed to rub out a critic. The big story remains the war whose rotted foundation Joe Wilson dared to expose; the ball to keep your eye on is in Baghdad and Basra.

And just in case anyone was wondering whether Dick Luger's recent demurrals, or John Warner's ominous throat-clearing, or Gordon Smith and Olympia Snow's timorous ass-covering, had actually breached the Bush bubble in recent days, the answer was on full view in the president's Fourth of July speech. It was the same as his answer to the Libby sentence — Go f- yourself — but the question in this case, the Iraq war itself, is way more consequential.

"I've heard it all before," Patti Scott, 72, of Richmond, Virginia, told the *Washington Post* after the speech. It's true; we have all heard it all before. It was an anthology of nearly every inane slogan, smirking lie, psychotic delusion and neocon *non sequitur* we have been fed since the rumors of war first rumbled. The only difference was that it was packaged in Independence Day wrapping. The analogy was implicit, but painful: W stands for Washington, with George W. Bush the latter-day father of our country's freedom. Another, more poisonous analogy — Bush, who notoriously ducked his own Texas Air National Guard duties, was speaking here to the West Virginia National Guard, who have not been so fortunate as their commander-in-chief — went blissfully unremarked.

"In this war, we face dangerous enemies who have attacked us here at home." No, those who attacked us at home were from Saudi Arabia and trained in Afghanistan. It is your pre-emptive war that has made Iraq an al Quaida recruiting ground.

"I know the passage of time has convinced some... that the danger doesn't exist." Ah, the "some say" straw man. Who is he talking about? Is Hillary soft on Osama? Is Barack blind to bin Laden? Or does he mean the peeps who painted that "Mission Accomplished" sign?

"But these people want to strike us again. We learned on September 11th that in the age of terror, the best way to do our duty... is to go on the offense." That was Afghanistan; this is Iraq. And if you really mean it, why not Pakistan?

"The world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power." Really? He was one bad dude, and Iraqis suffered for it, but hundreds of thousands of them have been killed since he fell. Is a world where America is a pariah, where our

armed forces are stretched dangerously thin, and where radical jihadists have a ready-made poster-boy in Bush: is that world safer than before shock-and-awe?

“Many of the spectacular car bombings and killings you see are as a result of al Qaida — the very same folks that attacked us on September the 11th. A major enemy in Iraq is the same enemy that dared attack the United States on that fateful day.” But to quote from McClatchy’s invaluable Jonathan S. Landay, “U.S. military and intelligence officials... say that Iraqis with ties to al-Qaida are only a small fraction of the threat to American troops. The group known as al-Qaida in Iraq didn’t exist before the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, didn’t pledge its loyalty to al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden until October 2004 and isn’t controlled by bin Laden or his top aides... U.S. intelligence agencies and military commanders say the Sunni-Shiite conflict is the greatest source of violence and insecurity in Iraq.”

“If we were to quit Iraq before the job is done, the terrorists we are fighting would not declare victory and lay down their arms — they would follow us here... However difficult the fight is in Iraq, we must win it.” Why in the hell would they not follow us here, no matter what the outcome in Iraq? “Victory”? “Win”? “The job is done”? *We* are going to win *their* civil war?

“If we were to allow them to gain control of Iraq, they would have control of a nation with massive oil reserves — which they could use to fund new attacks and exhort economic blackmail on those who didn’t kowtow to their wishes.” Ah, blood for oil. As if OPEC didn’t already make us kowtow. As if permanent US bases in Iraq, and permanent control of its oil, were not the real goal we are seeking, with “freedom” (like WMDs before it) the lure in a bait-and-switch scam.

“There are many ways for our fellow citizens to say thanks to the men and women who wear the uniform and their families. You can send a care package. You can reach out to a military family in your neighborhood... You can car pool.” Instead of sending them a care package, how about sending them home? Instead of car pooling, how about an energy policy that prevents our country from financing the very nations who hold our economy hostage, let alone the terrorists they quietly harbor?

For anyone who believes that the September surge reports by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will make a difference, or that wavering Congressional Republicans will cause Bush to change his strategy, just listen to what the president said on July Fourth about our the American Revolutionary War: **“Our first Independence Day celebration took place in a midst of a war — a bloody and difficult struggle that would not end for six more years later before America finally secured her freedom.”** Ignore the grammar, folks, but do the math. As long as George Bush is president and Dick Cheney is Vice President, as long as the Republicans retain a cloture-proof majority in the Senate, this surge and this war will not end.

That’s the stick the president poked in our eye on the Fourth of July. Commuting Scooter’s sentence is a galling and convenient illustration of his arrogance and unaccountability, but it is far from the worst damage he is doing to our country every day he remains in office.

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