



## Wolf Tickets

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By Walter Fields,

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### White House Seeks To Muzzle Foreign Press

It appears as though Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz is perturbed over the coverage of the debacle in Iraq by the foreign press, or should we more accurately state, the Arab press. Wolfowitz, an architect of the administration's strategy of "regime change" in the Persian Gulf, has voiced his displeasure with *al Jazeera* and the network's on-air coverage of the war. You may recall that *al Jazeera's* website was hacked and its offices in Iraq hit by mortar from U.S. troops. Now the network finds itself under attack by a high-ranking Bush White House official who claims to be seeking "fair" coverage.

Mr. Wolfowitz's complaint is the height of arrogance. Coming from an administration that just violated every code of human decency by parading the dead bodies of its enemies, this administration lacks any moral authority to attack the foreign media. This attempt to dictate the terms of foreign media coverage is an extension of the manner in which the White House is seeking to control the stream of information in the United States by allowing the consolidation of media properties. It is a dangerous sign when the most powerful nation in the world attempts to flex its muscles and intimidate the world press. We hope *al Jazeera* will not succumb to this thinly veiled threat and report on activity in the Persian Gulf as it sees fit.

The irony here is that it has been the foreign press and media, particularly in the United Kingdom, that has called into question the legitimacy of this war. It has been papers such as *The Guardian* and the television news network of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that has taken principled stands in exposing the many contradictions in the U.S. position on Iraq. Their tenacity has now placed the political career of Prime Minister Tony Blair in jeopardy, and rightly so, as Britain's media has revealed just how flimsy British and U.S. intelligence on Iraq was preceding the march to Baghdad. Now, as the body count of U.S. soldiers exceeds the number that died in the Gulf War and every day brings the report of another deadly ambush, we need more *not less* unfiltered coverage in the media.

While the British media stands out, the American media is just now beginning to dust off its cobwebs and ask critical questions of the White House regarding the so-called evidence used to justify the war. Still, some questions seem to go unasked and unanswered. For example, the release of some findings of the government's investigation into the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks should have provoked widespread condemnation of President Bush for the absence of any evidence of a link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, as Mr. Bush suggested and used to play upon the fears of Americans. Now, two of the primary claims – the presence of weapons of mass destruction and the terrorist link – made by the president to justify the invasion of Iraq have been proven to be false, at best, and purposely deceitful, at worse.

Still, we find networks like the Fox News Channel playing the role of state television, sufficiently waving the flag as it serves as the media cheerleader for the White House. Its coverage of the raid that killed Saddam Hussein's sons was reminiscent of the Roman Coliseum and the cheering for Caesar to condemn the subject to death. Almost gleeful, one news anchor described Uday and Qusay Hussein as "two of the nastiest characters in Saddam Hussein's regime." Moments later, in questioning Sen. Olympia Snow, he gushed, "Don't you think its going well?" when calling into question critics of the Bush administration. This supposedly "fair and balanced" coverage is what Mr. Wolfowitz must be seeking in taking on *al Jazeera*.

The White House must be confronted with the hard questions regarding the present travesty in Iraq. For starters we would like to know the numbers of Iraqi civilians, particularly children, who have been killed and injured since U.S. forces first descended upon Iraq in this war. The burning questions concern the absence of any evidence of weapons of mass destruction and any link between Hussein and Osama bin Laden. The attempt by the White House to obscure its deception by heralding the capture or deaths of Hussein loyalists in its deck of cards is wearing thin. No matter who is captured or killed among Baath Party leadership, it cannot hide the fact that this president led this nation into war under false pretenses. Now that it appears the U.S. will be returning to the United Nations to seek assistance in peacekeeping in Iraq, the foreign media should

be particularly vigilant. And the U.S media should follow; demonstrating the same gusto it exhibited in pursuing Mr. Bush's predecessor over a tawdry sexual liaison. That is only fair.