

IRAQ PAINPROGRESS, Redux, again

Jerry Krase (March 25, 2008)



Thinking about and re-thinking about the Iraq War after its Fifth Anniversary.

I originally wrote this Italianesque piece (PAINPROGRESS) in 2003 for The Free Press, and then I republished it in 2006 (PAINPROGRESS, Redux). Since the minor self-recriminations and a few “celebrations” of the Fifth Anniversary of The Invasion of Iraq many of the cheer-leading establishment press organs have been squirming about how wrong they had been for so long. However, they still haven’t gotten up the courage for mea culpas. Perhaps when Barack Obama becomes President their tune will change from loud militaristic drum beats to more appropriately muted taps for our four-thousand plus men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the follies of a few old men (and women). This is the introduction to the 2006 piece:
Now that some of us are about to admit at least a few of “our” past mistakes about the ill-everythinged Iraq Invasion, Iraq Occupation, Iraq War (both Civil and UnCivil), I would like to re-admit



one of my own non-mistakes which I wrote for the Free Press, the original [can still be read here](#) [2]. It was overlooked by The New York Times Op-Ed Columnist Paul Krugman's recent (12/08/2006) "They Told You So" essay about those who early on questioned America's bellicosity. He concluded his Op-Ed in this way:

"We should honor these people for their wisdom and courage. We should also ask why anyone who didn't raise questions about the war -- or, at any rate, anyone who acted as a cheerleader for this march of folly -- should be taken seriously when he or she talks about matters of national security." ([click here to read it all](#) [3]).

This is what I wrote: January 28, 2003. Park Slope, Brooklyn.

Today is the first day for the rest of my retired life. Yup, that's correct I am retired. I took the Early Retirement Incentive for New York State workers that was offered by a Governor for whom I more than once didn't vote, but to whom I will be eternally grateful. It's not that I will no longer be working. For example, I just got back from a trip to Rome. I was invited to participate in a conference entitled 'Merica. Convegno sulla cultura e la letteratura degli italiani del Nordamerica. As you might guess, it is about the culture and literature of Italians in North America. My travel expenses were paid, and I will go almost anywhere that my expenses are paid. I don't get that many invitations to travel further than New Jersey, and New Jersey is not exactly my idea of exotic or even interesting.

I flew on an economy ticket code shared between Alitalia and Delta Airlines. My wife didn't want to go with me, this time, so I traveled alone, but one can hardly be alone in Italy, as they don't allow it. Seriously speaking, I was honored at having been invited to join a group of distinguished American scholars to meet with equally distinguished Italian colleagues at two prestigious American Studies Centers in Rome and Cassino, which had as well a teleconference video connection with Siena. I had hoped that the meetings would not be conducted in Italian because my Italian language skills are not that great (ne non sono buono?).

However, when I finished my own presentation, one of the few which was entirely in English the moderator, in italiano, called for questions and comments and un professore italiano rose to the occasion. Italian professors always rise to the occasion and this one was no exception as he expounded for ten minutes in his favorite language before finally asking a question, also in his favorite language, and to which I rose to the occasion by expounding in ten minutes in my favorite language and then answering my own question which was the only one that I both understood and knew the answer to. When I finished my response, I was greeted with a sea of blank expressions and substantially polite applause.

We took a bus trip to deliberate at the University of Cassino and also tour the famous monastery at Monte Cassino. During the ride I read a short book written by an Italian who immigrated to Boston after the World War II. As a young boy he had fled the area with his family as the Allies (the good guys) began to bomb the centuries old Benedictine Monastery and the surrounding countryside. The war had continued even after Italy surrendered as Germany occupied the country and battled allied forces who slowly worked their way up the peninsula.

1700 ft above the town below, Monte Cassino was the center for the German Gustav line, 100 miles south of Rome. It dominated the surrounding countryside, including the valley that ran through the mountains to the north and the main highway linking the south to Rome. After weeks of furious bombing and shelling it was finally destroyed, killing German soldiers, and monks alike, as well as hundreds of civilians who naively had sought refuge there. As a result of the extensive campaign most of the surrounding towns, and farms, were also obliterated. The author described the sights of his return to his hometown. Nothing previously vertical was standing, neither buildings nor trees. Bomb and artillery craters had filled with water and in the summer heat they were breeding pools for



malarial mosquitoes. The heat and humidity also accelerated the rotting corpses of animals, soldiers, and civilians. I guess you might call it, Collateral Damage Italian Style.

Italians are intensely territorial and most of those who survived their "Liberation" slowly returned to rebuild their homes and lives, and by the late 1950s the monastery itself was completely restored. Actually, at the monastery I missed the guided tour because I misunderstood the instructions of one of my gracious hosts, who actually was speaking in English.

Speaking of multilingual confusion, I took off while our own monosyllabic bilingual Baby Bush (as opposed to monolingual polysyllabic Papa Bush) was gearing up to bomb the hell out of someplace, preferably Iraq but if that's not available; who knows? When I got to Italy, I read in Corriere della Sera that Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was emphatically denying, in Italiano, that Italia was supporting the US multi-unilateralismo (I just made this word up, I think) while in direct contrast in the International Herald Tribune, Bush's spokespersons were claiming, in English, that despite what Berlusconi was saying, in Italian, that Italy was in the pocket of the US. I think that the current administration in DC doesn't realize that that il Duce Mussolini is no longer in power in Italy and that Italy, for better or for worse, is an imperfect democracy.

As for Fear of Flying Italian Style, although I got back home to JFK airport in one piece, there was a two-hour delay in Rome's Fiumicino Airport. Alitalia claimed that there were some "equipment problems;" which didn't raise my confidence level in taking a nine-hour ride in a complex machine that just had technical problems fixed by people who don't speak English. I think they really postponed the take-off in order to fill the plane up with extraneous travelers, as there appeared on the departure monitor that an Aeromexico flight to NYC had mysteriously been combined with our Alitalia/Delta one. This merger happened only after they moved the departure gate first from 30, to 24, and then to 23 while I lugged my duty free booty from gate to gate to gate in search of flight 0611.

The Boeing 777 on which I flew both ways was a nice plane. Even in the narrow economy seats which lack sufficient legroom for anyone taller than 5' 6" there is individual video service so I was able to watch on demand movies, which if I had to pay for them I wouldn't have. The screen provided many languages options, so I fooled around by watching American movies in Italian and Italian movies in English, but they still weren't worth paying for. So I listened to classical music with these little earphone things that are supposed to fit into your ear holes but don't, unless you push them in further than they were designed to go. Occasionally the sound would cut out and there would flash across the screen "PAINPROGRESS." At first I was puzzled as to how they knew that my ears were hurting. Then it came to me that PAINPROGRESS meant "Public Address in Progress." But my ear holes still hurt.

It also appeared to me that PAINPROGRESS is a perfect symbol for the media war hype we are getting now from the USA's allegedly "free" jingoistic press. Even the once dependably skeptical NPR and its local version, WNYC, sound like Government Radio Stations when it comes to fronting for the President from Armageddon, Texas. Equally offensive are the visual variants of PBS to which we are currently subjected. Too bad they don't flash the PAINPROGRESS sign across the TV screen when some government "expert" or "independent" scholar from one or another enterprising institute is called upon to explain why Iraqi civilians deserve to die.

One constantly painful argument that is heard is that collateral damage is justifiable because Saddam had slaughtered "his own people." I guess the ones we are going to kill are not "his." The most odd thing on the flight was that when we within an hour of JFK airport, while I was avoiding embolisms by stretching by the toilets, I noticed that there were several swarthy brawny men going into a passageway that seemed to lead somewhere above the cabin. At first I thought that maybe there was a "party" up there. When they came down they were in Alitalia steward uniforms and until



we were strapped in for landing they walked up and down the aisles, I think looking for likely members of Al Qaeda. I guess they are the Italian version of Air Marshals.

In anticipation of the final, Final Battle against one or another of the Evil Empires which rotate along the Axis of Evil, a contingent of members of Voices in the Wilderness are already in Baghdad. Voices in the Wilderness is a US/UK group which is trying to end the economic sanctions against the "people," as opposed to the "government," of Iraq. Since March 1996, in violation of sanctions, almost fifty delegations have traveled to Iraq.

American authorities have warned that the penalty for traveling to Iraq, in violation of US laws, could be as much as 12 years in prison and over \$1 million in fines. VIW says that each member represents thousands of people who oppose the economic sanctions that miss the target of the regime of Saddam Hussein and instead fall on millions of Iraqi people, young and old. VIW follows the nonviolent tradition of Mohandas Gandhi. They oppose the development, storage and use by any country of weapons of mass destruction whether nuclear, biological, chemical - or economic. Today, as the drum beat quickens, they maintain a constant presence in Iraq.

They point to the devastating effects in the schools and hospitals, on the streets and in the homes of Iraq of more than a decade of economic sanctions and frequent bombings. They say they are in Iraq to serve as human shields for Iraqi women and children when the bombs start raining down on the city. The US has already notified Voices in the Wilderness that, as opposed to Trent Lott, US bombs don't discriminate, and that Saddam will ultimately be held accountable for any anticipated Collateral Damage. I believe that the moving deadline for Iraqi surrender is "any day now." I was happy to go to Italy and I was even happier to get back home unfortunately just in time to watch W's State of the Union Address and then not watch a rerun of "CNN Live from Baghdad." When W was having his usual trouble with hard words across my mind's eye in bold letters

These are some photos I took in March 2003 at the Anti-Iraq War demonstration and March in Washington DC. Please ignore the image dates as we didn't know how to set the camera.

Head of the March with wheeled escorts.



Sidelines Poster



Marching toward the Capitol.



Pro-War Horses in park near White House.





Pro-Anti-War Demonstrators.

Anti-Anti War Demonstrators.



Family on the subway going home after march.

Related Links: http://select.nytimes.com/2006/12/08/opinion/08krugman.html?_r=1&oref=slogin [3]
<http://www.nycfreepress.com/0022krase.html> [2]

Source URL: <http://test.iitaly.org/magazine/focus/op-eds/article/iraq-painprogress-redux-again>

Links

[1] <http://test.iitaly.org/files/1517answer-impeach-bush1206463707jpg>

[2] <http://www.nycfreepress.com/0022krase.html>

[3] http://select.nytimes.com/2006/12/08/opinion/08krugman.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

