

# Reality bites back

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The North American electronic media is now dominated by a concept known as "Reality TV". Bachelors and bachelorettes selecting

their life partners over the span of eight episodes; English nannies being employed to discipline American kids in a week; the hiring and firing of potential employees for large corporations — there is no shortage of ideas for 'reality' shows and no boundaries of privacy once the contender enters this bizarre world of controlled reality. In fact, for cable subscribers, there's a whole channel devoted to such "reality". Such is the success of this voyeuristic concept that a whole host of freshly baked reality programmes wait in the wings for the new season of American TV.

But, as usual, there is nothing real about this form of "reality". A controlled environment, iron-clad contracts for contenders, right down to "embedded audiences", reality TV reflects and deflects off the unreal relationship between American audiences and the media that they so happily consume.

In some exceptional cases, journalists and publications attempt to remind readers that there is a real war continuing in Iraq. But all summer, before the London bombings, both North American Television viewers and newspaper readers could easily have forgotten. It seems the complicity of the media with the American government could be summed up in a MasterCard like advertisement — "Misleading the nation into unending war: \$210 billion; national debt: \$7.8 trillion; free and uninhibited control of Middle East oil: priceless".

So, it seems that in a world that is increasingly becoming defined by an unelected and non-democratic Anglo-American media, the next hot button issue is going to be about the war between ideologies. Conveniently, terrorists have given several European countries the legitimate opportunity to institute new anti-terrorist laws that imitate US Homeland

security measures. This is in keeping with the new direction of the US military strategy, which now overreaches even the pre-emptive aims of the Neo-con's Project of the New American Century.

A March 2005 edition of the World Street Journal, analyses a Pentagon document that seeks to redefine the American military strategy. The document recommends the "need for a global deployment of US forces in acts of World-wide military policing and intervention". In other words, Big Brother will no longer just be on the TV, he's going to be in your house. The document as quoted in the WSJ also urges the need for global military polic-

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ing by US troops/forces to overcome four core problems including the need to "... build partnerships with failing states to defeat internal terrorist threats; defend the homeland, including offensive strikes against terrorist groups planning attacks; influence the choices of countries at a strategic crossroads, such as China and Russia (add Iran); and prevent the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by hostile states and terrorist groups."

The Journal also quotes a defence consultant, who was hired to write sections of the Pentagon document, as saying that the core thinking behind the document is to defeat any competitive rival in the arms race and in the production of military equipment "too expensive for these countries to even think about trying to run with the big dog".

The two Britons who lost their lives in Iraq last week belonged to a security company hired to protect British contractors in the country, according to Sky News who are there for the altruistic cause of "rebuilding Iraq". Michel Chossudovsky (Centre for Research on Globalisation) has a very different understanding; "The underlying objective for Europe is that EU corporate interests are protected and that European contractors are able to effectively cash in and "share the spoils" of the US-led wars in the Middle East and elsewhere." One recalls a conversation with friends on the eve of the war on Iraq. We debated the (lack of) ethics of European and American corporations jostling for contracts in "post-war Iraq" like vultures circling their prey prior to an attack. One of us cynically suggested how lucrative it would be to have a cemetery company, which could start digging graves even before the war began. Sadly, to date, the stocks of this imaginary company are still soaring high.

Europe has a decision to make — is it going to take on the Sisyphusian task of "keeping up with the big dog" and arm itself to the teeth, or reverse a trend that can only guarantee more wars and not only of ideologies. While Muslims around the world are being exhorted to condemn violence perpetrated in the name of Islam, it is time for the European and American people to condemn the military-industrial, and now media, nexus that is speeding up the global arms race — a race in which average citizens, regardless of their ideologies, are all going to be the losers. It's also a reminder of the futility of our need for F-16s and the like, especially when they come 15 years late.

Meanwhile, despite what "embedded" Hollywood film critics recommend, the only thing worth viewing this summer is neither on TV nor on the big screens. The only "real" thing produced in the American media this year is anti-war director Tim Robbins alternatively distributed play/film, *Embedded*.

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