

Iraq: The Pentagon's propaganda program

"Goebbels would be proud," said Katrina Vanden Heuvel in *TheNation.com*. We've known for years that the Bush administration deceived the public into supporting the war in Iraq, but this week *The New York Times* provided a startling new look at the depth of this deception. In a well-documented exposé, the newspaper revealed that those scores of "retired generals" the TV news networks hired as "independent military analysts" were literally getting their talking points from the Department of Defense, which cynically referred to them as "message-force multipliers." The generals weren't actually on the Pentagon payroll, said *The Boston Globe* in an editorial, but in return for their "rosy assessments" of the war's progress, they were given personal audiences with Donald Rumsfeld, and wined and dined by Pentagon officials. Many of the generals, it now turns out, were employed by firms bidding on defense contracts given out by the Pentagon—an obvious but undivulged conflict of interest. The parade of "military analysts" on your TV screen was, in other words, nothing but a full-scale "psychological warfare operation" by the Pentagon—aimed not at the enemy but at the American people.

Am I missing something? asked Michael Goldfarb in *TheWeeklyStandard.com*. By my reading, the

Times' sprawling, 7,000-word story presents no evidence either of the Pentagon's trying to coerce the generals into echoing the party line or of the generals' "using their influence to directly further personal interest." Did many of the generals have "business interests" in the defense sector? Yes. That's where retired career soldiers tend to have their business interests, for the same reason that most of them share a strong belief in the military's mission in Iraq.

The generals are not stupid men, said **Ralph Peters** in the *New York Post*, and they know the difference between propaganda and true military intelligence. In many cases, the generals were flown to Iraq for stage-managed, all-expenses-paid "Pentagon junkets" and then reported their "findings" on CNN or Fox News as if this was unfiltered information coming straight from their "trusted friends and acquaintances in uniform." Some of the generals, the *Times* revealed, soon realized that the war was *not* going well. But did they say so, or criticize Rumsfeld? That would mean getting booted out of their exclusive little club, and losing all that "defense-industry payola." To use the authority of your uniform for financial gain, and to "knowingly deceive the American people," makes you a disgrace to that uniform. "Period."