

## Comment

# The strange bright era of American impotence

May 5 to 12 was a bad week for the American Empire and its funny little wars.

Blair's electoral 'bloody nose', General Janis Karpinski's demotion for prisoner abuse, the Afghanistan protest marches against the goons in Guantanamo who put the Holy Koran on the toilet (with, some say, human turds on it), the UN's abandonment of Jellalabad, the dud hand grenade flung at Bush in Georgia, the errant Cessna that panicked and emptied Congress and White House, Putin's defiant praise of the Soviet Union, Kim Jong-Il's fuel rods, John Bolton's flame-out, Downer's grovelling on al-Jazeera, Doug Woods' brothers' 'charitable donation' to his torturers, Laura Bush's breezy defamation of her husband, and the continuing slaughter of Iraqi police and civilians show a War on Terror going badly and America's Loony Right pretty much on the ropes.

The idea that Bush, Rice and Rumsfeld are leadership material and leading anyone anywhere seems sillier by the hour.

A hundred and one years after the Wright Brothers' ascent at Kitty Hawk the American Century is over and the strange bright era of the New American Impotence and a multipolar world begun.

And there is no viagra for this. The orgy's over. And this was the week it became plain.

Eight and a half years after I first helped out with Beazley's Budget Reply Speech, a lot is the same. The same big office, the same three ageless, protective backroom girls, the same delighted yelps of merriment from the Leader down the corridor, the same impression of chivalrous climactic battle with the same Prime Minister and Treasurer, the same stoic flurry round 6 p.m. It's good to be back.

Kim's odd mixture of qualities—innocence, gravitas and self-mockery—has no parallel in politics. Whitlam had the last two, Clinton, John and Arafat the first and last, but nobody else I can summon up has all three.

Does this mixture, plus the physical hugeness, the mental sharpness, the garrulous wit and cubic hectares of learned information add up to a Prime Minister? Well, it certainly adds up to a Candidate, as lame duck

Simon and loose cannon Mark never did, and I've begun in prayerful hope the third part of my triptych, Hello Jerusalem.

'I always knew he'd be back,' said one of the backroom girls. 'I never, ever doubted it.'

We'll see.

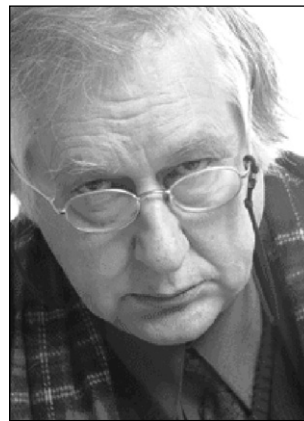
## Viewpoint

The idea that Bush, Rice and Rumsfeld are leadership material and leading anyone anywhere seems sillier by the hour.

by Bob Ellis

Saddam Hussein can't watch television, read newspapers, telephone his wife or consult his lawyers. He can read novels, though, write poetry, tend a small rock garden. No television interviewer can go near him, no friendly or hostile biographer, no prosecutor from the ICC. Unlike everyone in the democracies, he cannot ask for bail, or asylum, or (something John Paul might have given him) sanctuary in the Vatican.

The reasons aren't too hard to guess. Under international law Saddam is still President of Iraq, the war that overthrew him having been illegal, unsundered and uncompleted, and he, a lawyer, knows this. He might say so to an



interviewer and might moreover mildly ask why Americans bombed and burnt his property and murdered his sons and fourteen-year-old grandson. Why, in particular, they burned his yacht. What good did that do? Are the Americans crazy?

America's actions in Iraq, the killing of twenty thousand children, thirty or sixty thousand women and old men, twenty or fifty thousand

teenage conscript soldiers (like Saddam's words, the figures have been suppressed), the torture of Abu Ghraib, the shooting up of the wedding, the shooting of an Italian negotiator, the bombing of dams, water-purifying works, holy shrines and cemeteries, seem worse in some ways than Saddam's.

The number of Iraqis he killed, mainly Kurds in a civil war, number forty or sixty thousand. The number of Iraqis killed by Americans and their coalition 'partners', in two wars and a decade of sanctions, is over a million. Saddam, a lawyer, might ask that the two Bushes, heads of state like himself, be tried for this. No wonder he is not let speak.

His enforced silence, though, shows that nothing resembling 'freedom' prevails in Iraq, even after 'free' elections.

All of us are born free, George Orwell might have put it, but some are more free than others. Saddam is no more free than Winston Smith in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Discuss.

American soldiers are pretty free, though. They can kill anyone they like.

Discuss.

## Landcare launches its hero search

Environmental heroes are being urged to step forward and be identified by the national Landcare awards search for local projects and people who have done something to help save Australia's precious land and water resources. Landcare Australia has launched the search for environmental heroes as the 2005-06 national awards get under way.

There are a number of categories in which to enter with all state and territory winners being flown to Melbourne for a special celebratory function in 2006, hosted in conjunction with the 2006 International Landcare Conference.

Last year's event was a massive celebration of the power of landcare, with the finalists clocked up a remarkable 35,000 hours of voluntary time on landcare projects. This is the equivalent of 1000 people working for landcare full-time on a purely voluntary basis and figures show that last year's finalists planted a staggering 14 million trees, shrubs and grasses.

For more details, visit [www.landcareaustralia.com.au](http://www.landcareaustralia.com.au).

## What a way to celebrate turning sixty

Carol Page

Three Mullumbimby girls – Christel Taylor, Robyn Baker and Raylee Delaney, pictured right, left the sub tropics a few weeks back to join a horse trekking adventure near Adaminaby in the Snowy Mountains.

No cups of tea and keno at the club for these girls, they're far too outdoorsy for that, and they wanted to do something special for Christel's 60th birthday.

Up in the high country around a raging campfire, sunburnt, windswept and very much alive, they chumped on chocolate mud cake trucked in especially and toasted new and old friends with bubbly.

It was snowing in the high country when they left Byron in Robyn's red Toyota but their arrival at Reynella Rides was greeted by glorious crisp skies.

After a slow start the first morning sorting out suitable mounts the dozen or so riders and four crew were up, up and away – through beautiful native forest – on a track that led to the high plains and alpine meadows. Where, says Raylee, 'the air has a special rejuvenating quality and our lungs were singing the alleluiah chorus.'

Among twisted snowgums and yellow and white wild-



flowers everyone pitched in to set up a base camp of tents and swags with outdoor shower and pit toilet.

These days Reynella Rides operator Roslyn Rudd enjoys the mod cons of a caravan kitchen but cooks everything from dumplings to roast dinners and sensational desserts over an open fire. After expending all that energy six hours a day on horseback the aromas coming from her bush oven was just the lift the weary riders needed to get the saddles off and rub down and feed their horses before setting them loose for the night. John Rudd's policy 'horses first, humans second' has never wavered.

Christel, Robyn and Raylee describe days of filling their senses with stunning landforms and running streams, sightings of brumbies on more than one occasion and 360° views from on top of Oz, breathtaking and exhilarating.

On the second night one of the riders recited the Man From Snowy River, a moving rendition made even more relevant by our surroundings, which brought tears from more than one around the fire.

Everyone found the last day a touch sad because Kosciuszko is the sort of place you can get lost in forever and saying goodbye

would be hard. The outside world had faded into insignificance and, as Raylee so aptly put it, for five fantastic days 'we could have been the only people on Earth'.

I was a little sad too, it had been great to catch up with my buddies from Mullumbimby. Robyn, Christel and Raylee left with a rosy-glow fitness, renewed energy and a determination to ride the high country again.

A mountain change was just what the doctor had ordered for me and I love my new backyard.

For more info on Reynella Kosciuszko Rides – November to April – go to [www.reynellarides.com.au](http://www.reynellarides.com.au)

DON'T FORGET .....

STILL SOME PLACES  
IN THE FOLLOWING  
FABULOUS ACE CLASSES:  
STARTING SOON!

### Visual Art & Craft:

Ancient Art of Stone Sculpture  
Everyone Can Mosaic  
Mask Making

### Business & Work Studies:

St. John's Senior First Aid  
Senior First Aid Parasol  
Identify & Respond to Children  
& Young People at Risk of Harm

### Hospitality:

Responsible Service of Alcohol  
Responsible Conduct of Gambling  
Safe Food Handling

### Computers:

Safe Computing, Intro to Photo Editing,  
Effective PowerPoint, Effective Scanning,  
Seniors Computing Stage 1, Broadcasting  
using RSS, Quickbooks

### Life Style:

Oriental Acupressure & Heat Therapy, Solomon  
Yogalates, Alexander Technique

### Parenting:

Virtues – Are they Old Fashioned?,  
Siblings without Rivalry

### Personal Development:

Intimacy & Nourishment for Women,  
Assertiveness & Improving Relationships

### Cooking:

Vegan/Vegetarian

### Outdoors:

Easy Composting,  
Sustainable Gardening

