

## Re-aligning rationality: Crisis Management and Prisoner Abuses in Iraq

### Abstract

This article offers a case-based illustration of a dysfunctional organization approach to understanding crisis management. It is based on the recent government crisis concerning the U.S. military abuse of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib. The paper questions whether the prisoner abuse situation in Iraq was just a case of poor (crisis) management or an expression of systemic neurosis at the highest levels of government. At one level, we can see this crisis as a major advertisement for employing better trained crisis management specialists and making crisis management communications a mandatory element of U.S. military training since the situation contained classic examples of faulty information, information mismanagement, failure of leadership, poor media relations, poor planning, and many other problematic behaviors. Our alternative reading is that it can be understood as the normal outcome of a sick system that is beyond the reach of rational public relations crisis practice, requiring a much further reaching critical intervention.

We begin with a brief description of the case, summarizing the developments related to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the early hearings regarding prisoner abuse, and the ongoing struggle for control of the situation. Looking at the extent of the crisis, we suggest that this situation could not have been managed or contained using rational models of crisis management. Applying crisis management techniques might have resulted in damage containment but it would not be able to explain *how or why* the crisis was made possible or why the public relations aspect of it was handled so badly. Using the neurotic organization model, we argue that this is a case of systemic organizational dysfunction. Rather than seeing the crisis as an abnormality, we suggest it should be seen as a *normality*, as the outcome of the normal functioning of a dysfunctional system. Instead of characterizing it as irrational behavior, we suggest working to understand its rationality *within* a dysfunctional system. Only this approach will ultimately allow us to fully comprehend the cause of this crisis and prevent future ones.

### A brief background to the crisis in Iraq<sup>1</sup>

In September of 2002, one year after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, now-president George W. Bush addresses a UN General Assembly stating that they must confront “the grave and gathering danger of Iraq or stand aside, leaving the U.S. to Act”. U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair releases a dossier on Iraq’s military capability, supporting Bush’s statement. A November UN resolution mandates that UN weapons inspectors return to Iraq. Iraq cooperates with the inspection process.

---

<sup>1</sup> Event summary is based on timelines provided by NPR [http://www.npr.org/news/specials/iraq2003/war\\_timeline.html](http://www.npr.org/news/specials/iraq2003/war_timeline.html) BBC, [http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/co](http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/co) and TwinCities.com Pioneer Press <http://www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/news/nation/8701414.htm?1c>, all retrieved on 5/26/2004.

In March of 2003, the U.K. ambassador to the UN states that the diplomatic process has come to an end. The UN arms inspectors leave and Bush gives Saddam Hussein and his family 48 hours to leave Iraq or face a war. Three days later, a U.S.-led campaign invades Iraq, missiles hit Baghdad and British and U.S. ground forces enter from the south. In April of 2003, U.S. forces enter into central Baghdad and the military occupation is underway. In the north Kurdish forces working alongside U.S. troops secure the towns of Kirkuk and Mosul. Despite the presence of U.S. occupation troops, widespread looting breaks out in Baghdad and a number of other cities. In May 2003, the U.S. gets UN approval for the establishment of a U.S.-led administration, and the economic sanctions against Iraq are lifted. By July 2003 a U.S.-selected Interim Governing Council (IGC) is put into place. The U.S. military faces a growing guerilla resistance.

Between August 31 and September 9, 2003, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, the head of the Guantanamo prison camp, suggests that interrogation and detention procedures used there can be employed in Iraq. He also suggests that prison guards can participate in setting up the conditions of interrogations. In October 2003 the UN Security Council approves an amended U.S. resolution on Iraq with the stipulation that power be transferred to the Iraqis as soon as practicable. In October 2003, major abuses take place at Abu Ghraib prison. Between October 13 and November 6, 2003, Maj. Gen. Ryder conducts a review of prison conditions and finds problems throughout, including an inadequate number of prison guards in some units. Between November 2003 and May 2004, an intensification of attacks takes place against U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq, despite the capture of Saddam Hussein. Members of the governing council are targeted as well as ordinary Iraqis working with U.S. occupation authorities.

In January 13, 2004, Army Spc. Joseph Darby an MP with the 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade at Abu Ghraib blows the whistle on prisoner abuses. On January 16, 2004, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez announces the military investigation of alleged abuse reports at Abu Ghraib. A guard leader and company commander are suspended and the commander of the 800<sup>th</sup> Brigade is admonished. In January 19, 2004 Gen. Sanchez orders an administrative investigation headed by Maj.Gen. M. Taguba. March 12, General Taguba presents his findings to General Sanchez. His report indicates widespread abuse by military police and prison guards. Six soldiers are brought up for charges. Photographs of alleged abuses are made available to CBS. U.S. General Richard Myers asks CBS to hold off on publication. He gets a two week delay. In April, 2004 the first of a series of photographs depicting prisoner abuse by U.S. troops is made public, and the prisoner abuse crisis begins. On May 1 the Taguba Report is accepted by General Sanchez and more soldiers are relieved of duty. May 7 U.S. Senate and House Committee Hearings call on Defense Secretary Rumsfeld to testify. He offers apologies and says those involved in the prisoner abuse scandal will be punished. He also mentions that more photos and videos of atrocities are yet to come.

The Bush Administration attempts to defuse the crisis involve a number actions including attempts to confine the alleged abuses to lower level personnel; characterizing the cause of the problem as “poor leadership” and a “few bad apples; holding court martials for a number of accused prison guards and MPs; and denying any knowledge of abuses by levels higher than that of the prison’s commander. President Bush and other high level officials issue apologies for the abuses. Washington Post investigators reveal that Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prisons are

just the more notorious of detention centers run by the U.S. military and the CIA around the world. They estimate that over 9000 people are being held around the world in secret locations or at the hands of U.S. allies outside the provisions of International Law (Post Gazette 5/23/04).

On May 24, in a speech to the Army War College in Pennsylvania, Bush states that the prison would be destroyed “as a fitting symbol of Iraq’s new beginning”. Deputy Chief of the Human Rights Organization in Iraq, Ahmad Hassan al-Uqailli, dismissed Bush’s promise as a Republican ploy, noting that “The problem is not changing the location or the name of the prison. It’s about the staff of the prison. . . . Even if a person is a prisoner, he is a human being first who must be treated with respect and dignity” (Aljazeera.net 6/25/2004).

May 26, reports are made regarding a U.S. Army document dated May 5<sup>th</sup>, showing the involvement of more military units in prisoner abuse, including Iraq cases dating back to April 2003 and the death of a prisoner in Afghanistan in December 2002 (see Denny 2004). The *New York Times* admits that its reporting leading up to the war and the early occupation “was not as rigorous as it should have been” and that it relied on sources that proved not to be credible (Orkent, NYT 5/30/2004, p.2) Amnesty International releases its 2004 report on human rights around the globe and charges that the U.S. has proved “bankrupt of vision and bereft of principle”. The Pentagon announces that General Sanchez will be replaced as the commander of the U.S. forces in Iraq.

### **A classic case of a dramatic profile**

Let’s now take another look at the events and what made them possible. As we saw above, the Iraq prison situation has all the requirements for becoming a classic “how not to” case in crisis management but that does not really explain *why* the events happened. Of course, we could simply assume that the government and the military in particular are run by ignorant, untrained, and ill-equipped people. This is a rather simplistic explanation however and one that does not explain the particulars of these events. How could an otherwise orderly and rule-bound system create such chaos? What caused the failure of existing control structures and decision-making systems? Was there no one that was trained in PR, CM, HR or any other management function?

When we look at organizational crisis situations, there is always the tendency to take a rationalistic approach to examining the system and its functioning. Not only do we assume that the system can handle its crises in a rational fashion; we assume that the system is rational to begin with. In this case, we will argue that organizational systems can and should be read from different perspectives, including those that assume a lack of rationality, or more precisely, an alternative rationality that is created by systemic dysfunction.

Organizational dysfunction exists when the structure, culture, and basic functioning of the organization are governed by a particular psychological obsession, pre-occupation, addiction or compulsive pattern (see e.g. Cohen & Cohen, 2003; Kersten, 2002; Schaef & Fassel, 1988; Ryan & Oestreich, 1991; Jackall, 1988; Ruth, 2004). Dysfunctional organizations may be obsessed by rules and structures, by control compulsions to control or by work addiction. Like dysfunctional individuals, they may show all the external signs of success while internally they are accidents

waiting to happen in the form of violence, burnout, or depression. In this case, we would argue that the dysfunction at work was a dramatic neurosis (Kets de Vries, 2003a,b).

Dramatic neurosis exists when the primary fantasy of the top executive is attention seeking and acted out through the performance of drama: exciting, bold, uninhibited theatre. The person at the top craves excitement, activity and stimulation (Kets de Vries, 2004). "His guiding theme is, 'I want to get attention from and impress the people who count in my life.'" So he is always doing things. A compulsive showoff, he will take risks no sensible entrepreneur would take, because he is doing it for personal, not business reasons. Because he is out of control, he easily becomes a bully and a tyrant'. (Kets de Vries, 1997)

Dramatic executives create dramatic organizations that develop around the *person* of the top executive and, unlike compulsive or paranoid organizations, they have very little need for information, rules or structures. The organization goes where the leader wants it to go, based on his/her vision, dreams, values, hopes and ideals. Often very charismatic in nature, the leader attracts subordinates with high dependency needs that idealize the leader and are easy to control and manipulate. This results in complementary but dysfunctional relationships, based on one-sided trust, uniformity, and conformity. Practicality and good business sense are of little concern as leaders and members are fully convinced of the appeal and the correctness of their actions. "Build it and they will come". "God will provide". "We only need to do that which is right". From a strategy perspective, the dramatic organization is "hyperactive, impulsive, venturesome and dangerously uninhibited; favoring executive initiation of bold ventures; pursuing inconsistent diversification and growth; [and] encouraging action for action's sake" (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984, p. 31).

The structure, culture and decision-making structure of the dramatic organization complement the centralized focus. The decision-making style is typically unreflective, impulsive, centralized and singular. The structure is "too primitive for its many products and broad market", lacks "influence at the second-tier executive level" (p.31), concentrates all power in the hands of the chief executive and provides for little to no upward or lateral communication. Its culture is "well-matched as to dependency needs of subordinates and protective tendencies of CEO" (p.31). Subordinates are heavily engaged in "idealizing and mirroring" (p.31), psychodynamic processes that allow them to identify with the leader, personalize their relationship, and absorb his/her style and thinking. The leader in turn is the "catalyst for subordinates' initiatives and morale" (p. 31). As long as subordinates agree with and support the leader, they will be accepted, protected and taken care of. Not surprisingly, the organization is also characterized by non-participative decision-making, group think, heavy conformity and lack of questioning.

Narrative is of particular importance in the dramatic organizations. Gabriel (1991) suggests that organizational narrative not only has the function of providing members with a tool for sense-making and meaning construction. Narrative also provides members with an emotional outlet, creating "a poetic space in which fantasy prevails over reality; where spontaneous, unplanned activity temporarily replaces regimentation; and where pleasure temporarily overshadows expediency" (p. 337).

We will try to demonstrate below that the theatrical script of the current government is indeed bold and uninhibited, organized around a central heroic narrative with a strong us vs. them thematic. The structural and decision-making patterns reflect the dramatic characteristics of simplicity, conformity and centralization as well as the general disregard for information and control. These patterns not only allowed for the emergence of the prison crisis in Iraq. They also constituted and continue to constitute a different reality within which rational management techniques cannot crisis situations.

### **The Heroic Narrative**

When we look at the events as they developed in Iraq, a number of themes emerge that are consistent with dramatic neurosis. Organizing these themes is Bush's visionary narrative of Iraq, a heroic scenario of the U.S. liberation of Iraq and the destruction of Saddam Hussein. There are three themes within the narrative. The first is "us versus them", or those who are not with us are against us. The second deals with information and decision-making patterns that served to reinforce the grand narrative and the third theme is "the rules don't apply to us", dealing with repeated U.S. violation of international law. We will explore the narrative and its three themes in the discussion that follows.

At a very basic level, Bush's vision of Iraq can be described as a *fantasy narrative* that reads somewhat like an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie: "The U.S. invades Iraq, under the heroic leadership of G.W. Bush. Not only does the U.S. find the evidence of the weapons of mass destruction that the rest of the world (UN inspectors) could not find. It also finds links to Al Qaida and the 9/11 attack and brings the guilty parties to justice. In the process, it liberates Iraq from a horrendous oppressor and institutes a vibrant democracy, symbolizing to the world the moral supremacy of the United States of America".

Unfortunately, this is not what happened. In fact, not only have *none* of the narrative components materialized; the whole episode now reads more like a Roald Dahl story, taking dark and unexpected twists that destroy the assumed hero of the story. Where did this story first come from, we could ask? Interestingly, Iraq appeared to be on President Bush's agenda, or at least on the agenda of the neo-conservatives (neocons) in his administration, long before 9/11 happened. We could speculate that Bush's own preoccupation with Iraq may have existed on account of Bush Sr.'s "unfinished business", perhaps a need to outdo his father, or maybe Bush Jr. was acting out a mirrored script, one that suggested military action in Iraq was an inherent part of presidential theatre. Bush of course authorized other military activities but Iraq was a venture uniquely his and one he seemed intent on fulfilling, in spite of lack of support from the UN, from allies and from forces internal to Iraq.

Bush's advisors strongly supported the invasion of Iraq. U.S. foreign policy under G. W. Bush has been shaped by neocons who define the U.S. has having a special responsibility in the world. Robert Kagen (2003), a major neocon representative describes the mission as follows: "At this point in time, it is American power, and American power only, that can serve as the organizing principle for the worldwide expansion of a liberal civil society. . . the U.S. has acquired this responsibility at a dangerous and chaotic moment in world history" (p. 69). Reports, dating back as far as 1992, document neocons like Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz

arguing for U.S. independent action against Iraq and Korea (see Hussein 2003). This group advocated an “us or them” orientation regarding the rest of the world and the use of massive military force to control areas of strategic and economic value such as the Middle East and Central Asia. With the coming to power of G. W. Bush in 2000, the group gained legitimacy, and after the attacks of 9/11 it gained predominance (see also Sidky, 2004, p. 4).

The attacks of 9/11 figure centrally in the narrative, if for no other reason than their symbolic impact. This was the first major attack of the US mainland, and one that left the country shaken in its image of itself, its power and its safety. It also placed an immediate responsibility on the President to act and the actions advocated by the neocon script appeared to provide a perfect answer: a demonstration of U.S. military force and power through military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Neither Afghanistan nor the Iraq missions turn out to be successful. Bin Laden is not found, resulting in more loss of face for Bush and the whole nation. Iraq is invaded and Hussein is found but his weapons of mass destruction are not, and the Iraqi people, with the exception of the Kurds, do not provide popular support for the U.S. occupation. Instead of establishing order, the U.S. occupation is associated with disorder, looting, violence, and a growing anti-American opposition.

Not only did the thematic narrative not anticipate this; it provided no resolution. Within the narrative, the only possible role for Bush and the U.S. is rule by force. There is no turning back in the story, there is no alternative script. The narrative becomes a psychic prison. As Morgan (1997) notes:

Favored ways of thinking and acting become traps that confine individuals within socially constructed worlds and prevent the emergence of other worlds. As in the case of Plato’s allegory of the cave, disruption usually comes from the outside. But the hold of favored ways of thinking can be so strong that even the disruption is often transformed into a view consistent with the reality of the cave. (p. 220)

This can be seen repeatedly in the administration’s denial of contrary data. Moreover, because there is no way out, the narrative’s basic plot keeps reappearing and, at every turn, the U.S. continues to insist that they can establish legitimacy by force. There are now problems with Iraq’s governing council and the occupation has turned into major civil warfare against the Iraqi population, resulting in increasing violence and the arrest of more and more people. Just when it looks like it cannot get any worse, reports and photos are leaked documenting U.S. military abuse of prisoners. In the face of a major scandal, Bush is forced to apologize. But in the days following, the violence continues and U.S. forces are reported to bomb an Iraqi wedding party, claiming that they were acting on legitimate information and evidence.

### **The Three Central Themes in the Narrative**

This last event is interesting because it highlights the problems that have existed all along in the identification of the enemy. The philosophy and strategy of the Bush administration depended strongly on an “*us versus them*” sentiment, effectively fueled by the events of 9/11. However,

they ran into repeated problems when it came to actually specifying who constituted “us” and who constituted “them”. At a national level, the lines were drawn very sharply. Anyone opposing the war was “them”. Anybody objecting to funding the war was “them”. Anyone publicly questioning or criticizing the administration was “them”. This was extended to the media where it suddenly became unacceptable to voice opposing opinions. News reporting became a political matter subject to censure, whether government- or self-imposed. This not only applied to the media’s willingness to curtail its news reporting in the supposed interest of military goals. It also applied to the reporting of other data. A recent editorial the *New York Times* notes that in “some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged” (Associated Press 5/26/04).

Internationally, it was also essential to distinguish friend from foe. Longstanding allies like France were quickly turned into enemies, following their opposition to the invasion of Iraq, a strategy accompanied by culturally misplaced symbols like the renaming of French fries. Failing to cooperate with U.S. demands, the UN as a whole became an enemy and in fact, other than Great Britain, the enemy seemed to be everybody else.

And who was the enemy in Iraq? This in itself was somewhat confusing to the American public who could not at times figure out the linkage between Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden, even though we were assured repeatedly that the two were linked, that evidence was forthcoming, and besides, we all knew: Saddam was a bad guy anyway. The Iraqi population was expected to be in the good guy category, as long as they would cooperate with being liberated and properly support and cheer U.S. actions. When this was not forthcoming, things got further confused.

One illustration of this is the prison population in Iraq. The Red Cross reported that between 70 and 90% of Iraqis held at Abu Ghraib “had been arrested by mistake” (The Week, 4, 157, p. 5). Earlier administration reports characterized the prisoners as dangerous criminals and terrorists; yet, following the first releases of photos of prisoner abuse, large numbers of the prisoners were suddenly free to go. Another element contributing to the “us versus them” separation was the anti-Muslim, anti-Arab sentiment, by now prevalent in the U.S. Commenting on U.S. aims to “democratize” the Middle East, Said (2003) comments that these views

provide Americans not with the ideas about Arabs and Muslims but rather the way they would like Arabs and Muslims to be. . . . Underlying this particular Imperial perspective is a long standing Orientalist view that will not permit the Arabs as people to exercise their right to self-determination. They are thought of as different, incapable of logic, unable to tell the truth, fundamentally disruptive and murderous. (p. 3)

Earlier anti-Arab prejudices have undoubtedly been fed by the political events of the past few years and in turn, fed into both the public perception of Iraqis and the military perception of their prisoners. While military personnel is always trained to “de-face” the Other in order to enable the very act of war, the recent prison incidents bring the consequences of such de-facing into grim awareness. Now *any* Iraqi, male or female, young or old, guilty or not, could be turned into the enemy and as a consequence, face a horrible fate This is of course tragic enough in itself but

when the dehumanization is photographed and published, it broadcasts worldwide how we see, and treat, “the enemy”. This problem, and the volatility surrounding it, resurfaced again in November 2004 when a Marine shot an unarmed and wounded man in a Mosque. Early media reports defended the action, quoting the explosion of corpses in the streets.

Kets de Vries (2004; Kets De Vries and Miller, 1986) notes that this “us versus them” separation or splitting is very characteristic of neurotic cultures. He describes the phenomenon as “folie a deux” or shared madness. Characterized by suspicion, hostility, distortion and a projection of those feelings unto “the enemy”, folie a deux generates exclusive, closed and high dependency cultures that protect one’s self from outside attacks. What makes the process often difficult to detect is that “(t)he shared delusions are usually kept well within realms of possibility and are based on actual past events or certain common expectations” -- thus containing “a bit of reality” (p. 128). In this situation in particular, the bits of reality and the bits of delusion appeared to intermingle frequently and anyone who did not share our view of the world became the enemy and in this case, the enemy was everywhere!

We noted earlier that people often develop strong attachments to their perceptions of the world and that these attachments protect their social constructions, negating any information or actions that attack them. This leads us to the second theme in the narrative, which is the way in which *information and decision-making* processes were managed. Over the year, evidence has been mounting that the intelligence reports that provided the basis for the Iraq invasion were inaccurate. A lengthy analysis of Bush administration “justifications” for the invasion and occupation conducted by the CarnegieEndowment for International Peace (2004) considers their claims as “systematic misrepresentation”. Contentions that Iraq had “weapons of mass destruction”, was linked to the Alqaida network, and was active in supporting “global terrorism”, were found to be groundless and unsubstantiated with valid and reliable evidence ( Cirincioni, 2004, p.8). In Europe this led to much public debate and the resignation of top level officials in various countries. In the U.S., the response was simply that the evidence, the “real truth” was out there. If Powell’s statements to UN were inaccurate, this could not be helped. When UN inspections provided no results and no weapons of mass destruction were found, the response was the same: “It’s there somewhere, we just need to find it”.

When a report came out stating that there were no linkages between Alqaida and Iraq, Bush commented that there is a connection simply “because there *is* a connection”. Likewise, on August 31 2004 in a speech to the 86<sup>th</sup> Annual National Convention of the American Legion he states that: “Even though we did not find the stockpiles that we thought we would find, Saddam Hussein had the capability of making weapons of mass destruction, and he could have passed that capability on to the enemy, and that was a risk we could not afford to face after September the 11<sup>th</sup>. Knowing what I know today, I would have taken the same action. America and the world are safer with Saddam Hussein sitting in a prison cell.” Time and time again, we see the Bush administration not only denying information but in fact claiming that information is not necessary, it is irrelevant. This pattern was repeated throughout the Bush presidential campaign,

which focused on reinforcing the public's fear of the enemy (whoever that may be), and a need to feel protected militarily, in spite of all evidence to the contrary.

Sometimes of course it becomes impossible to deny information. While the early reports from the Red Cross regarding prisoner maltreatment were ignored (between March and November 2003), this was no longer feasible once the photos were released to the public. The CBS program 60 Minutes II broadcast horrific pictures of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. Paul Wolfowitz, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, and a top neocon, admitted to "major mistakes" (*Pittsburgh Post Gazette* 5/19/04). At the same time however, top GOP leaders opposed the release of more photos on grounds that they might compromise future prosecutions (Detroit News 6/14/2004).

Finally, when information cannot be denied, it can still be reconstructed or spun. On the one hand, we have Gen. Taguba backing up the conclusions of a confidential Red Cross report, which said that military intelligence intentionally had used forbidden interrogation techniques" (Week, 5/14, p. 6). On the other, we have Victor Davis Hanson's statement that "Abu Ghraib is remarkable precisely because it stands in such contrast to America's ideals. Let's punish those who've embarrassed our nation but let's also remember that only "a few miscreants" were involved". The public relations battle around the prison events has centered, predictably, on the question of whether the events are "only the result of a few bad apples" or must be understood as reflective of systemic dysfunction. Even if we take the apple approach, it of course begs the question of the system's accountability for its fruits. Predictably, the focus has been on identifying individual culprits rather than systemic failures and on August 26 2004, Donald Rumsfeld commented that the Schlesinger and Fay reports indicated that "steps were taken to deal with (the wrongdoings). . . and that is how the process is supposed to work" (IIP 9.13/2004)

Rumsfeld goes on to say that the prison abuses had nothing to do with the interrogations since the abused were mostly "criminals", an interesting distinction that once again reinforces the confusion around the "enemy". The 2004 Schlesinger Report and the Fay Report on Military Intelligence both portray the prison abuses as the work of low-level personnel and deny that any officially authorized interrogation policy or "any responsible Department official 'could conceivably have authorized or condoned' such abuses". On September 13 2004 the Department of Defense referred 45 individuals for court martial. Letters of reprimand have been issued for 12 general officers and 23 soldiers have been administratively separated (Defense Department Report, 9/13/2004). Finally, it was reported on September 29 2004 that a U.S. Army Reserves sergeant faces disciplinary action for writing a report critical of the U.S. army conduct in Iraq. If convicted he could face 20 years in prison on charges of disloyalty and insubordination (Boehlert, 2004). In his report "Why we cannot win", Sergeant Al Lorentz (2004) says:

Because the current administration is more concerned with its image than with reality, it prefers symbolism to substance: soldiers are dying here and being maimed and crippled for life. It is tragic, indeed criminal that our elected public servants would so willingly sacrifice our nation's prestige and honor as well as the blood and treasure to pursue an agenda that is ahistoric and unconstitutional.

From the perspective of crisis management, the whole issue of information and facts is vital. However, what this incident also illustrates is that the line between fact and fiction, information and fantasy, reality and ideology may be very blurry indeed. The line is governed not by our desire to be rational, because reality always looks rational to its occupants. It is governed more by the subtle processes of openness, inquiry and dialogue that are among the first to go when people and organizations develop neurotic tendencies.

Not only have the Iraqi events been based on and guided by poor, inaccurate, false and distorted information. They have also been placed largely outside of the democratic process, reflecting the kind of centralized decision-making that is characteristic of dramatic cultures. This is echoed in the last theme of the grand narrative which is "*the rules don't apply to us*". This is a particularly apt theme for a dramatic culture because it strongly reflects the narcissism that is characteristic of all neurotic organizations, but of dramatic cultures in particular. The dramatic culture is so enamored with its own story and so fully believes in its reality, its morality and its promise, that it places itself outside of the rules and regulations that govern the rest of the world.

This theme came up in a number of different ways. First, as it related to the decision to invade Iraq. When the UN Security Council does not support the U.S. demands and proposal to invade Iraq, the U.S. and Britain decide to go it alone. This course is consistent with the neocon philosophy described earlier but it is particularly interesting here because it is in clear violation of existing international law. It is also breaks with existing agreements with ally nations who now become the enemy, France in particular. Even at a national level, the decision is made without official declaration of war, circumventing standard democratic process.

This theme also emerged in connection with the prisoner abuse. There were repeated statements by high level officials that the Geneva Convention rules regarding the treatment of prisoners were not applicable to Iraq, Afghanistan or any other terrorist investigations. Related arguments have been made regarding the Patriot Act which suspended and/or abolished longstanding rules regarding arrests, the use of information and the rights and treatment of prisoners. In all these instances, the argument was made that the ends justify the means and the goals of the operation were sufficiently important that information could be extracted by "extra-ordinary means", another dimension of the dangerous lack of inhibition characteristic of dramatic organizations.

When individuals and governments come to believe that rules do not apply to them, many dangerous options become possible, including those witnessed in the Abu Ghraib prison. There too, the reality was created that "the rules do not apply to us". Whether this was by formal instruction or by impression is still not clear but what is clear is that people felt free to do whatever they wanted to do. This is a curious construction within the military, an organization that is normally characterized by compulsion, by neurotic attachment to the existing rules.

What is it that allows such an organization to make such a radical shift, or minimally create a sudden vacuum within its existing culture? We would argue that the military, along with the Bush administration, bought into the dramatic narrative *and* its subscripts. It is made possible when people believe in the moral superiority of their narrative, and when they can see the enemy

in any other person, acting on false information and believing that the rules do not apply to them. Within this reality, prisoner abuse becomes not only possible, it becomes rational and acceptable. What we perceive and define as “crisis” is only a natural and inevitable outcome of a dysfunctional process. Now we only wonder about what additional outcomes await us. Not only does the war in Iraq continue; there is discussion of additional wars on other ‘public enemies’. Also, a report by Washington Post investigators revealed that the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prisons are just the more notorious of detention centers run by the U.S. military and the CIA around the world. They estimated that over 9000 people are being held around the world in secret locations or at the hands of U.S. allies outside the provisions of International Law (Post Gazette 5/23/04).

### Conclusion

This paper began as an attempt to make sense of ongoing failures to apply crisis management theory in practical situations. We felt that existing public relations theory was too rationalistic and should be supplemented with insights from dysfunctional organization theory. After the prison events in Iraq unfolded, they seemed to offer the perfect case illustration for our argument. More than ever, we are now convinced that traditional management theory is not capable of making sense of the kinds of crises that confront us. While these theories have their place and utility, they are not able to help us understand or change the systemic dysfunction of our governments and our organizations. If we are to understand, prevent and manage our crises, we need to understand the conditions that make such crisis possible. Once we are capable of such understanding, we may be in a better position to make changes in our organization, making them more functional and rational. If we succeed in this, we may eventually also be able to implement the useful and practical advice of crisis managers.

### References

- Boehlert, E. (9/29/2004) Operation American Repression?  
[http://archive.salon.com/news/feature/2004/09/29/military\\_justice/index\\_np.html](http://archive.salon.com/news/feature/2004/09/29/military_justice/index_np.html) Retrieved 11/26/2004
- Cirincioni, J. Mathews, J.T., Perkovich, G. and A. Orton (2004) *WMD In Iraq: Evidence and Implications*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C.
- Cohen, W. and Cohen, N. (2003). *The Paranoid Organization & 8 Other Ways Your Company Can Be Crazy*. New York: AMACOM.
- Detroit News “Senior Officials Oppose Release of More Abuse Images”  
<http://www.detnews.com/2004/nation/0405/11/nation-15049.html>
- Denny, A.D (2004) “Discipline, Training, Leadership Scored in Prisoner Abuse” International Information Programs, US Department of State  
<http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive/2004May/11-874026.html> Retrieved 11/28/04
- Fay Report on Military Intelligence (2004)  
<http://news.findlaw.com/nytimes/docs/dod/fay82504rpt.pdf> Retrieved 11/26/2004.
- Gabriel, Y. (1991), "Organizations and their discontents: A psychoanalytic contribution to the study of organizational culture", *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 27, 3, pp. 318-337.

- Hussein, K. (2003) "Neocons: The Men Behind the Curtain", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November-December.
- Jackall, R. (1988), *Moral Mazes*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Kagen, R. (2003) "Supremacy by Stealth: Ten Rules for Managing the World", *The Atlantic Monthly*, July-August.
- Kersten, A. (2002). Organizing for powerlessness: A critical perspective on psychodynamics and dysfunctionality. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 14, 5, pp. 452-467.
- Kets de Vries, M. (2004). Dysfunctional leadership. *Encyclopedia of Leadership*. Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire/Sage. Retrieved 4/12/2004 from <http://www.knowledge.insead.edu>
- Kets de Vries, M. (2003) A world expert throws some light on the dark side of leadership. *New Zealand Management*, 50, 2, March. (Interview Des Dearlove/Kets De Vries)
- Kets de Vries, M. (2003). The entrepreneur on the couch. *INSEAD Quarterly*. Retrieved 4/12/2004 from <http://www.knowledge.insead.edu>
- Kets de Vries, M (6/17/1997). Life in the Executive Fast Lane. Master's Forum. Retrieved 11/29/2004 from <http://www.mastersforum.com/archives/ketsdevries/kets-r.htm>
- Kets de Vries, M. and Miller, D. (1984), *The Neurotic Organization: Diagnosing and Changing Counterproductive Styles of Management*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Kets de Vries, M. and Miller, D. (1986), "Personality, culture and organization", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 286-279.
- Lorentz, A. (2004) Why we cannot win. <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig5/lorentz1.html>  
Retrieved 11/26/2004.
- Morgan, Gareth (1997), *Images of Organization* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Ruth, R.. (n.d.) Working with problems of narcissism in entrepreneurial organizations. ISPSO Papers. Retrieved 5/17/2004 from <http://www.sba.oakland.edu/ispsso/html/ruth.html>
- Ryan, K. and Oestreich, D. (1991), *Driving Fear Out of the Workplace*. Jossey Bass, San Francisco.
- Said, E. (2003) "Imperial Perspectives", in *Al-Ahram* July 24.
- Schaefer, A. and Fassel, D. (1988), *The Addictive Organization*. Harper & Row, San Francisco.
- Schlesinger Report (2004) <http://news.findlaw.com/wp/docs/dod/abughraibrpt.pdf> Retrieved 11/26/2004.
- Sidky, M.H. (2004), "Groundless Theory, Mangled Practice: Theoretical Problems and Practical Consequences of U.S. Policy Formulation and Implementation in Afghanistan and Iraq", paper presented at the Eleventh Annual International Conference On Advances In Management, Orlando Florida.