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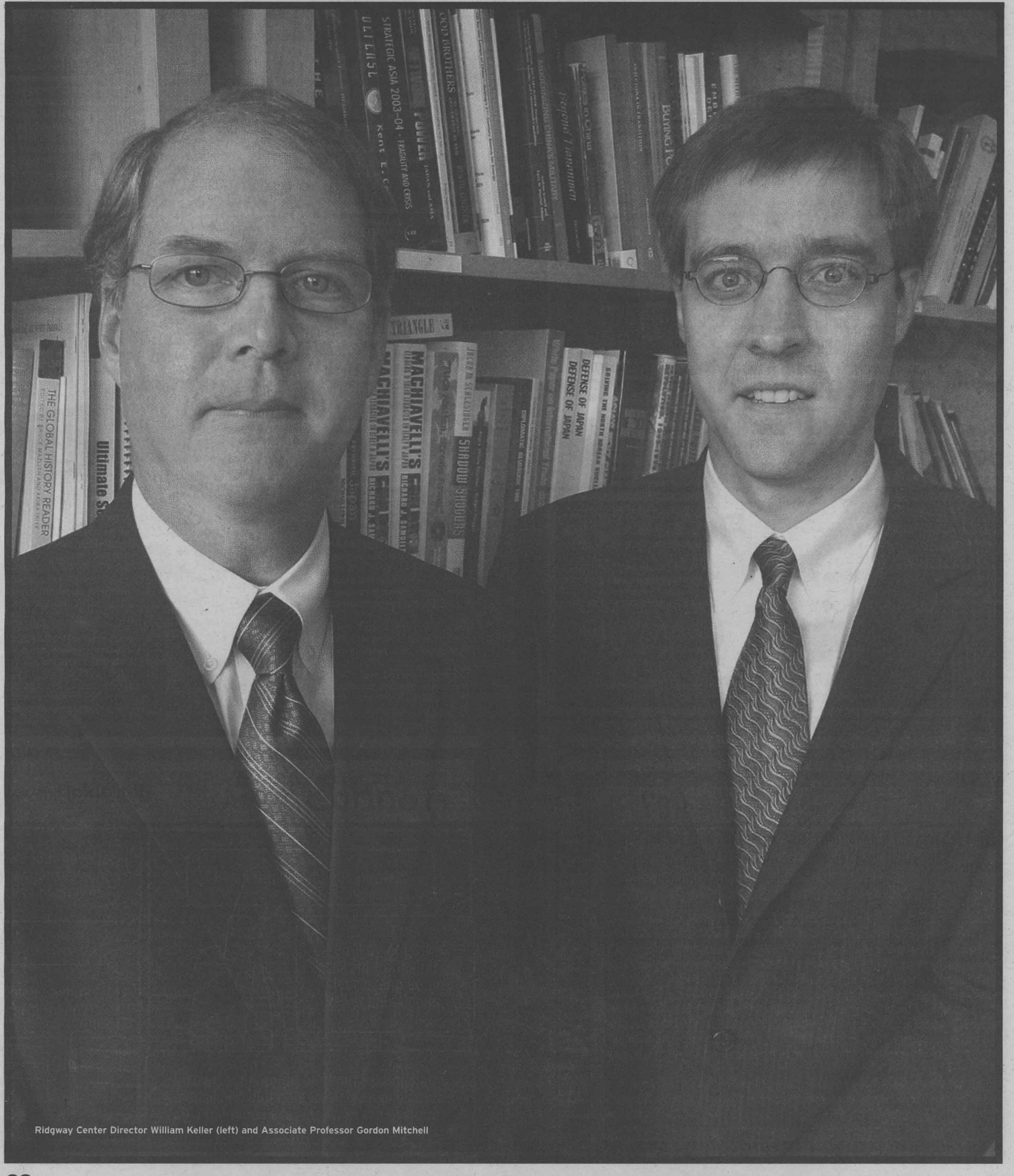
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# \*TERROR\*

PITTSBURGH ACADEMICS CONTEMPLATE THE NEXT STEP IN THE WAR ON TERROR

# INCOGNITA

[ BY CHRIS POTTER ]
CPOTTER@STEELCITYMEDIA.COM

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FROM ALL APPEARANCES — and for all we know — the University of Pittsburgh's Posvar Hall could be one of Dick Cheney's "undisclosed locations." A squat concrete bunker that glowers over Schenley Plaza, it looks like it could withstand a direct bomb strike (and maybe be improved by one). It's architecture of a style known as "Brutalist": blunt and belligerent, its presence intruding on everything around it. It looks like the perfect place for plotting a war on terror.

It may seem ominous, then, that the building's third floor houses Pitt's Matthew Ridgway Center for International Security Studies. But the Center, named after a Pittsburgh-born general and diplomat, is based far from Washington, D.C.'s warren of think tanks ... and it has two unusual goals. One is to raise the level of debate "from Pittsburgh to the world," and to raise the stature of Pittsburgh on the stage of international policymaking. The other is to find solutions to the bunker mentality so prevalent in national-security discussions today.

"A marketplace of ideas is what we try to have here," says William Keller, the director of the center and a professor of international security studies. The problem is that a lot of the stores are being shuttered — by a combination of fear, public confusion and government secrecy. "The new communism is terrorism," Keller says. "There were dangers in communism, and there are dangers in terrorism, but [neither] justify tearing down all the constitutional protections and rights that we have."

And throughout the "war on terror," agrees Gordon Mitchell, an associate professor of communications who chairs the center's working group on military intervention, "There has been a failure to really ask the hard questions."

With some calling for military action against Iran and North Korea — even as American troops remain in Iraq and Afghanistan — those questions are especially pressing.

Were the intelligence flaws about Iraq's weapons programs a fluke? Or are we destined to repeat them elsewhere? If we attack a country that poses no immediate threat, are we pre-empting future dangers — or creating them?

Mitchell and Keller have co-edited a book they hope will provide some answers. Due out this September, Hitting First: Preventive Force in U.S. Security Strategy will be the first of six books the center plans to publish in the next few years. Each volume considers different aspects of "security" — from the use of preventive force against terrorists, to the rise of China, to child soldiers in the Third World. The debate over security, Keller and Mitchell say, needs to include a broader range of subjects — and a broader audience.

"The discourse in national security is pretty arcane," Keller says. "And that's very often used to exclude a wider public from understanding it. We want to educate people as thoroughly as we can."

Because, as it turns out, the country's survival may depend on it.

IMAGINE A WHITE HOUSE war room where liberal-arts majors sit beside generals and intelligence analysts. That's the feeling you get reading *Hitting First*, a collection of a dozen essays.

The book combines essays by debate-team champions with a salvo from a Naval War College instructor. This is a national-security team that comes with its own inhouse philosopher: Tom Rockmore, a Duquesne University philosophy professor.

The Ridgway Center "work[s] in a multidisciplinary format, because the security problems we have today can't be addressed from a single discipline," says Mitchell. And the other side has already enlisted philosophers of its

own. Many of the "neoconservatives" who made the case for invading Iraq were partly inspired by a University of Chicago philosopher, Leo Strauss.

"Few philosophers have been involved in this discussion to date," Rockmore says. His own research has pondered the relationship German philosopher Martin Heidegger had with Nazism. Rockmore's dabbling in politics "cost me dearly," he says. "But the issues are so important that philosophers have to risk taking a stand."

And as Keller points out, "This global war on terror" is itself "kind of a metaphor": a battle against an emotion rather than any particular enemy. It's a war being waged not just with troops, but with tropes. Consider, for example, Condoleeza Rice's famous warning: "[W]e don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."

In many ways, *Hitting First* is a work of literary criticism. And it focuses on an essential text in the war on terror: President Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy.

Most Americans outside Washington don't pay much attention to the NSS, a yearly statement of defense priorities. Most Americans *inside* Washington don't pay much attention to it either. But the 2002 edition was different. For the first time, it spoke of

defending the United States ... by identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders. ... [W]e will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self defense by acting pre-emptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country.

The key word here is "pre-emptively," Hitting First contends. Pre-emption usually means that if troops are massing on your border, you can attack before they invade. But if you attack much earlier - when the troops are training, say you aren't acting "pre-emptively" at all. Your action is "preventive" instead. And that's a different matter entirely, says Keller, because "You can't distinguish preventive war from naked aggression in most cases."

seem like meaningless distinctions, especially after 9/11. If the North Koreans are about to launch a nuclear missile, or terrorists are about to release nerve gas in a subway tunnel, isn't it too late for a "preemptive" response? Wouldn't it be wiser to just bomb the missile silos or terrorist training camps now?

That's the Bush administration's argument. But the problem, as Hitting First contributor G. Thomas Goodnight argues, is that "the standard of prevention ... equate[s] the justification for self-defense with the insecurities of any nation wishing because of ... war." Some of history's most offensive (in either sense of the word) military actions were taken in the name of "preventing" an imaginary threat.

So how do you respond to an unseen enemy, and without creating more enemies in the process? Hitting First provides its own rules of engagement.

RULE #1: DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE. The Hitting First contributors are unanimous that the Bush administration willfully exaggerated the threat Iraq posed — and that it could do so again.

Administration critics enjoy seeing contributors like Rodger A. Payne replay flawed administration claims about Iraqi WMD. In light of current events, its almost amusing to be reminded of Cheney's pre-war claims that Iraq "has been absoweapons" and that it "has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons." Intelligence agencies played along. Payne notes that in 2001, the government's National Intelligence Estimate surmised that "Iraq did not appear to have reconstituted its nuclear weapons program." A year later, however, the estimate began warning that Iraq "began reconstituting its nuclear program shortly after the departure of [weapons] inspectors in December 1998." What's less amusing is that similar misjudgments could happen again

RULE #2: THE HARDER YOU LOOK FOR ENEMIES, THE MORE YOU'LL FIND AND EVEN CREATE. Your intelligence isn't likely to be intelligent enough, at least not to provide justification for launching a preventive war.

"Continued exaggeration of foreign threats ... is nearly inevitable," writes a former intelligence analyst, Greg Thielmann. Part of the reason is bureaucratic buttcovering: The consequences for underestimating threats are worse than the consequences for overestimating them. And both the stakes and the likelihood of a false alarm are higher when a country is on a war footing. In trying to assess the other side's intentions, Thielmann argues, we often project our own fears. Those Again, to many Americans, these might lutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear fears can be self-fulfilling, as our reaction results in countermeasures like threats and saber-rattling. "[T]he Iraqi example stands as a harbinger of a grim alternative future," Thielmann writes, "when inherently imperfect intelligence combines poisonously with an aggressive approach

#### RULE #3: THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A WMD.

There are only nuclear, chemical and biological weapons — and they don't belong in the same category.

Nuclear weapons are far more logical weapons - and much harder to acquire. Still, there's a reason Rice's "smoking gun" was a mushroom cloud and not a whiff of mustard gas, the more realistic threat. "There are major political effects to bundling [these weapons] together" in a single category, Mitchell

points out, summarizing an argument made repeatedly in the book. "You had Bush administration officials talking about mushroom clouds, but leveraging the claim with evidence that Saddam had chemical weapons. There's no connection between those things, but the WMD acronym makes a bridge" - and raises fear of a nuclear attack.

RULE #4: JUST BECAUSE A DICTATOR IS EVIL, OR CRAZY, DOESN'T MAKE HIM SUICIDAL. Just as the Bush administration lumps together WMD, it also falsely lumps terrorists and tyrants

into the category of "evil-doer." As New School for Social Research arms-control expert William Hartung argues in his essay, "Tyrants with state power are first and foremost survivors." That means that even if a dictator like Saddam Hussein had a nuclear device, he'd be unlikely to give it to al-Qaeda - for fear they'd use it on him or, in using it on someone else, bring retaliation when the weapon was traced to its devastating than chemical and bio- source. It also means, Hartung and others in the book argue, that deterrence and negotiations can work with states like Iran. ("The only true 'undeterrables," Hartung writes, are "the practitioners of catastrophic terrorism.") Such tactics have a better track record than preventive invasions, at any rate.



PRULE #5: IF IT'S DANGEROUS FOR THE TERRORISTS TO KNOW TOO MUCH, IT'S DANGEROUS FOR THE REST OF US TO KNOW TOO LITTLE. Conservatives often argue that tactics in the war on terror must be kept secret because "loose lips sink ships"; Hitting First argues that having an informed public is a national-security concern—as vital to defense as metal detectors.

In their own contribution to the book, Keller and Mitchell argue that Bush administration "intelligence failures" were only one reason Iraq has gone off course. The larger issue was a "discourse failure" in society as a whole. Had Democrats and journalists questioned the claims about Iraqi "WMD" more aggressively, they argue, there would have been more discussion of what happened after Baghdad fell, and miscalculations might have been avoided. If the administration ignored its responsibilities, they suggest, it's not alone. "Can US citizens learn from this episode and avoid unnecessary loss of blood and treasure in the future?" they ask.

We may soon find out.

**SOME OF THE** arguments in *Hitting*First may sound familiar. But underlying them is an assumption you don't hear often these days:

You're actually not in that much danger.

As Keller says, "I grew up under the fear of Mutual Assured Destruction" — when a Cold War nuclear exchange could have wiped out all of human civilization — "so I feel safer today than I did a while ago." In fact, he adds, "It may be we have to tolerate a certain amount of terrorism."

It's hard to imagine George Bush shrugging, as Thielmann does, that "The need to act with haste militarily in advance of an attack is much less critical" than it used to be [emphasis added]. And many Americans would dispute Tom Rockmore's claim that, since it wasn't Afghanistan itself that attacked the U.S., but a handful of terrorists living there, 9/11 "does not morally justify attacking and destroying Afghanistan in response."

"We're going to be casting ourselves as the loyal opposition for awhile," acknowledges Keller, "because these ideas are too new to gain broad acceptance immediately."

On that, at least, he and Michael Glennon would agree. "Ask Americans the very simple question: 'Had we known about it in advance, do you think we should have taken steps to prevent al-Qaeda's attack on New York?" says Glennon, a Tufts University professor of international law and member of the Council of Foreign Relations. "Every American would say that's a no-brainer. If we could have hit terrorist bases in the Clinton administration, most Americans would say yes. But that's a pre-emptive or preventive attack."

The problem, Glennon argues, is that the

nations, nor any workable laws governing how they should protect themselves.

Such arguments have supporters across the ideological spectrum. "The Bush pre-emption doctrine was a response not just to 9/11, but [also] to the breakdown of the traditional U.N. framework for determining whether to use force," argued Ivo Daalder, a liberal-leaning foreign policy expert at the Brookings Institution, during a 2004 forum hosted by Glennon's university. "[W]e would have come to this point ... sooner or later."

In fact, Daalder represents a school of thought that could take pre-emption to levels undreamed of even by Dick Cheney. "What do we do with a country that doesn't allow [health officials] in to determine whether

### "I GREW UP UNDER THE FEAR OF MUTUAL ASSURED DESTRUCTION, SO I FEEL SAFER TODAY THAN I DID A WHILE AGO." —— WILLIAM KELLER

And while the Bush administration will suffer no rival, Rockmore remains, well, philosophical about other aspiring military powers. "From here," he says by phone from France, "it's not clear why it's so wonderful for the U.S. to have weapons to protect themselves, but so terrible for anyone else to have them." If there was a credible rival somewhere in the world, "It might encourage — perish the thought — restraint on people who are inclined to go to war."

United Nations "effectively prohibits both."

The U.N. charter, he notes, permits a nation to act in self-defense only "if an armed attack occurs against it." There is no provision permitting you to strike first — even if the tanks are at your doorstep. Glennon argues that Bush's war on terror merely fills a vacuum in international law: Combating terrorism requires preventive force because the threat is both so elusive and so deadly. But there is no international force to protect

[bird flu] is attacking its population ...?" he asked. "[We] may need to violate their sovereignty, in order to protect us because distant threats can hurt us at home."

As it turns out, George Bush and the United Nations have something in common. In recent years the U.N. has advocated (though not always practiced) the preventive use of force to stop genocides and other potential humanitarian disasters. One of the Hitting First essayists, Simon Reich,

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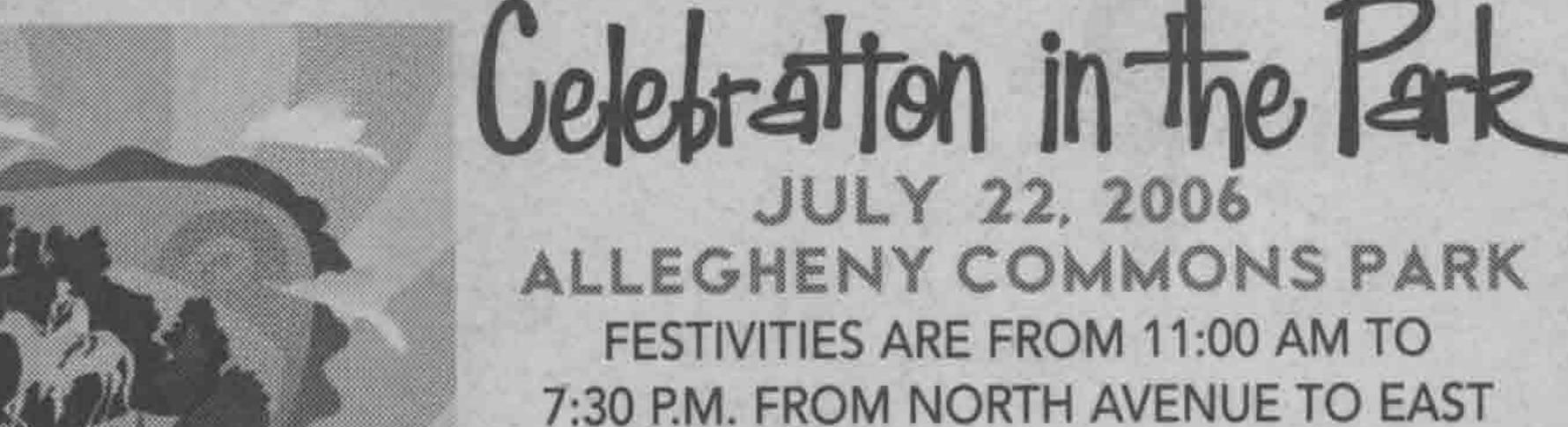
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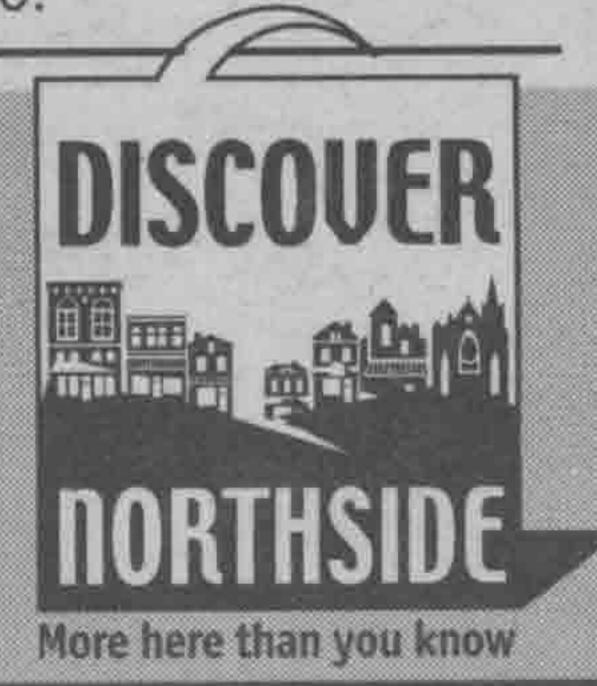


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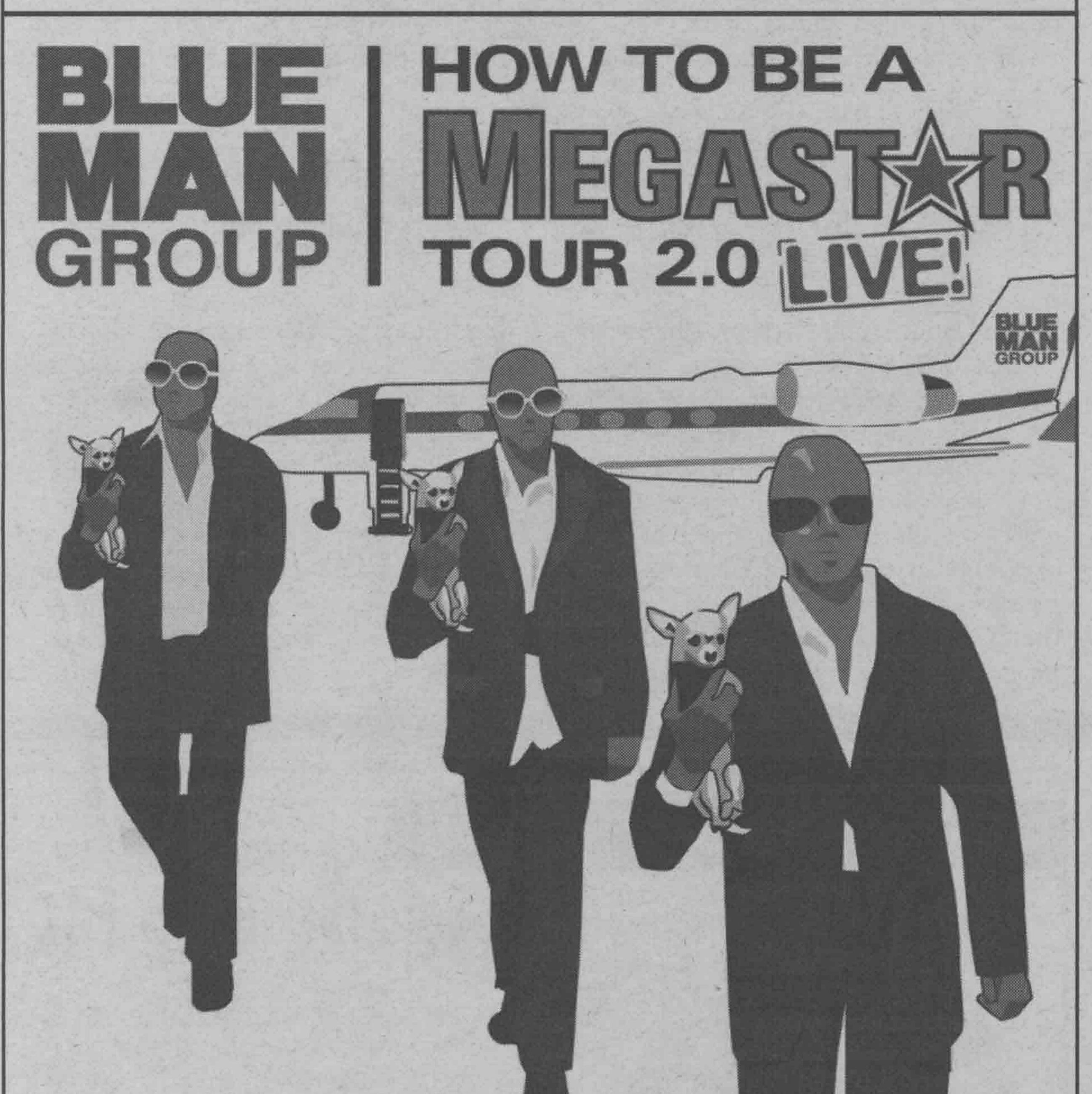
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notes that in doing so, it has eroded the concept of sovereignty — a nation's right to govern its own citizens. Once "the sacred cow of sovereignty" was no more, Reich argues, the Bush administration began justifying action against states for national-security, rather than humanitarian, reasons.

"Times have changed and threats have evolved," Mitchell agrees. But while it "is difficult to distinguish legitimate self-defense from illegitimate first-strike attacks," he says, that's no reason to permit the latter. At any rate, he says, there are "non-military forms of prevention," which can "provide security [and] make use of first-strike force unnecessary."

The neocons disagree. "What was 'unacceptable' to President Bush a week ago (a North Korean missile launch) has been accepted," fumed William Kristol in a July 17 Weekly Standard column. In June, the Standard published a piece by Michael Rubin similarly accusing Bush of taking a "Clintonian turn" in North Korea and elsewhere.

Watching this sort of fallout is, at least, entertaining. But Keller and Mitchell's concluding essay in *Hitting First* sounds a note of caution. "[A]lthough Bush administration officials promise that the United States will not 'do another Iraq,' the framework for public discussion set up by the White House ... remains intact. Many of the same patterns

## OFTEN IN THE WAR ON TERROR, GORDON MITCHELL SAYS, "PEOPLE SAY 'DON'T BOTHER ME WITH THE FACTS; THAT'S INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR."

Hitting First suggests a few. Since it turns out that weapons inspectors in Iraq did a pretty good job after all, William Hartung's essay notes, that program should be expanded. (Currently, the International Atomic Energy Agency has a \$270 million budget to track nukes worldwide; prewar inspections in Iraq alone, by contrast, cost more than \$1 billion.) Hartung also notes that just as bank robbers rob banks "because that's where the money is," terrorists seeking nukes will "go where the weapons are." And that's not Iraq or Iran or North Korea: It's the former Soviet Union, where Hartung estimates there are 40,000 nuclear weapons, with enough radioactive material to build "tens of thousands more." Rather than invading countries that might build weapons in the future, he argues, it would be more cost-effective to purchase weapons that already exist, often under lax security.

But when it comes to punishing outlaw states, the answers are trickier. As Daalder argued, the U.N. has struggled to respond to challenges effectively, because each member of its Security Council can subvert the general good for its own purposes. "Should we really allow a China, singularly focused on obtaining sufficient energy to feed its industrialization, to veto imposing an oil embargo on Iran" when that may be "the last best effective way to deal with the threat of Iranian nuclear weapons? I don't think so."

Bush's critics, says Glennon, are often right to be wary of White House overreaching. The problem, he says, is "their skepticism seems to stop at the water's edge."

AS CHAOS CHURNS in Iraq, such debates may seem beside the point. Nowadays, the Bush administration sounds like the voice of restraint, while neo-conservative hawks fume.

Consider the reaction to North Korea's failed July 4 test of a missile that (theoretically) could strike the United States. "There are attempts to try to describe this almost in breathless World War III terms," Bush spokesman Tony Snow said during a July 5 press briefing. "This is not such a situation."

of argument [to justify war in Iraq] have been applied to the public debate surrounding Iran's nuclear program."

The Bush administration may have created that framework, but the rest of us are trapped within it. Even as war hawks accuse Bush of sounding Clintonian, the Clintonians themselves are sounding like ... war hawks.

In a June 22 Washington Post op-ed, William Perry — Bill Clinton's secretary of defense — sounded like no one so much as Bill Kristol. The U.S. should launch a pre-emptive missile attack, he wrote, "[I]f North Korea persists in its launch preparations." While such an attack "undoubtedly carries risk," he acknowledged, "the risk of continuing inaction in the face of North Korea's race to threaten this country would be greater. ... [W]e cannot sit by and let this deadly threat mature."

"This is a problem that goes much deeper than the current administration," Mitchell says. Democrats like Hillary Clinton are trying to outhawk the Bush administration on Iran, he notes. "Journalists need to ask: What's the evidence that the use of preventive force will result in positive change in Iran? I have a sneaking suspicion that they don't have a good answer, that they're simply posturing."

Drawing on Keller's experience as a debater, Mitchell and Keller's Hitting First essay suggests specific questions for reporters to ask the next time government officials propose a preventive war. (Example: "Have [intelligence agencies] conducted any official analyses that [support] your claim that US forces will be 'greeted as liberators'?") But if Democrats are posturing, they're getting help from a strange place: conservative media outlet Fox News, which is waxing apoplectic — and apocalyptic — over North Korea and Iran.

"They've got a missile that can reach Kansas City and Chicago," Fox News military analyst David Hunt fretted on June 19—two weeks before the missile failed. "We've got to stop this. It cannot be allowed. They have the atomic bomb and now the missile that can hit Kansas City."

On a March 30 Fox political-affairs talk

show, meanwhile, conservative commentator Mort Kondracke predicted that the Iranians "will be able to have enough fissile material of their own making for a bomb sometime next summer."

That estimate is at least four years earlier than the Bush administration expects. Yet National Public Radio's Mara Liasson agreed, "Pretty soon, Iran is going to have the bomb."

Such fearmongering helps create what Keller and Mitchell call "discourse failure." Mitchell describes the phenomenon as "a breakdown in the democratic process where you don't have the usual ability to weed out the ideas that don't belong."

One problem is that Americans aren't even talking about the same ideas. The profusion of talk radio, cable news channels and blogs have fractured the news audience along partisan lines. "As members of society communicate more, they grow farther apart and ... less capable of coming to terms with unfamiliar viewpoints," Keller and Mitchell write. It's not just that audiences are getting different "spins" on the story; they're getting whole different stories.

Or as Glennon tartly puts it, "All these multiple media outlets have allowed people to indulge their cognitive dissonance."

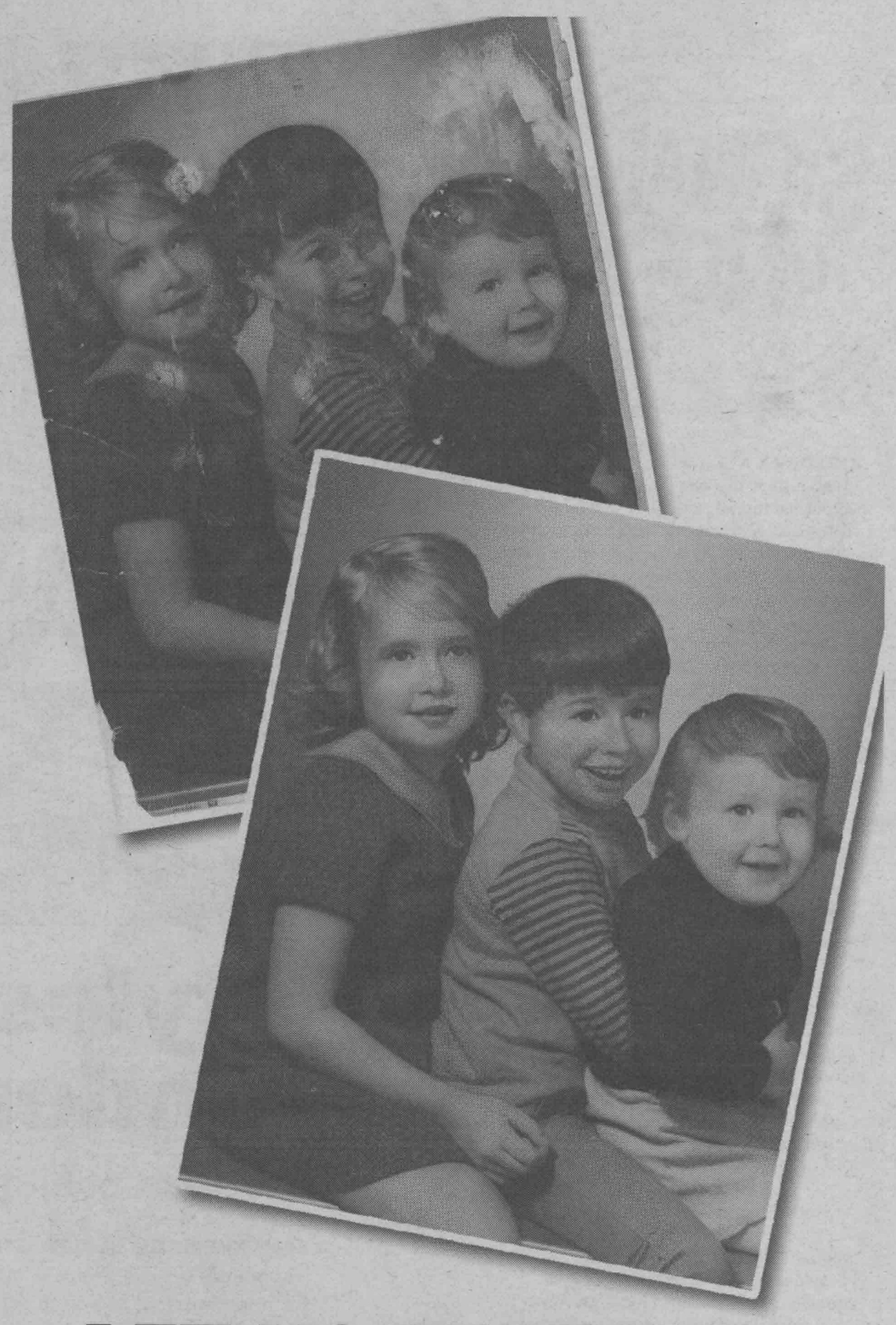
The effect is compounded by what Mitchell sees as the public's increasing insistence on a "right not to know. ... People say 'Don't bother me with the facts; that's inappropriate behavior."

Indeed, according to a 2005 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, the public is increasingly disenchanted with major national newspapers like The New York Times and The Washington Post — the publications most likely to report aggressively on the shortcomings in the "war on terror." Between 2001 and 2005, the percentage of Americans viewing those publications favorably dropped from 74 to 61 percent. That's a larger drop than suffered by Congress, President Bush, or even the local TV news.

No surprise, then, that many conservatives accused the Times of "treason" when it reported on a government anti-terror program monitoring international financial transactions. (This despite the fact that the 2002 National Security Strategy boasts that the government will "deny terrorists access to the international financial system.")

As Hitting First ominously concludes, the real intelligence problem here may be yours and mine. Even if journalists had questioned government claims about Iraqi WMDs, would enough Americans have been paying attention? For all their optimism, it's hard for Keller and Mitchell to escape a bunker mentality of their own.

"There's enough distance between the 9/11 attacks and today that the envelope of acceptable discourse has expanded," Mitchell says. But, he adds, "a major challenge for us is how to make these arguments after the next terrorist attack. Which is inevitable."



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