Letters

Ed Harriman's catalogue of the corruption and financial shenanigans surrounding the US presence in Iraq reveals remarkably consistent practice (LRB, 7 July). In 1971 I wrote a book about Cornelius Hawkridge, a Hungarian-American who conducted a vendetta against the military and civilian corruption that dogged the American presence in Vietnam. I still have many volumes of corroborative evidence presented to US Senate hearings at the time: *Improper Practices, Commodity Import Program, US Foreign Aid, Vietnam; Military Club Fraud and Currency Manipulations* etc. They detail the same kinds of practice as Harriman does. The General Accountability Office's report of May 1967 revealed that the civilian contractor RMK/BRJ could not account for $120m worth of materiel shipped from the US to Vietnam. RMK/BRJ's name crops up frequently in investigations from the period in connection with the disappearance of huge sums of taxpayers' money – one reason for this was the company's gross overcharging for gasoline (Harriman found evidence of the same thing). The acronym stood for Raymond, Morris-Knudsen, Brown, Root and Jones. Much of the current investigation surrounds Halliburton's subsidiary KBR, which stands for Kellogg, Brown and Root. I have yet to see anyone point out KBR's genealogical connections.

A few years ago in Manila I had dinner with John Negroponte when he was still US ambassador there. Later, he would become ambassador to post-Saddam Baghdad and then George W. Bush's intelligence supremo. He was a Vietnam veteran, and I plied him with questions about the massive corruption during the war. 'Yes,' said Negroponte, who had also been involved in the covert funding of the Contras in Nicaragua, 'we learned an awful lot from that war.' Foolishly, I took this to imply repentance.

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