

Opinion

The Anti-Empire Report

Some things you need to know before the world ends

By William Blum

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Katrina and the Good Americans

October 22, 2005 (killinghope.org)—All the kindness, all the concern and generosity, the utmost empathy, taking strangers into their homes, donating so much money and goods and time, helping them find a roof over their heads, find a job, locate their loved ones . . . But it must be asked: Why is it that so many of these same people can show so little concern for the many, many victims of US foreign policy—the bombed and the tortured, the maimed and the impoverished, the widows and the orphans, the overthrown and the suppressed? How can these kind and generous Americans take delight and pride in the “shock and awe” of the Pentagon military machine? How can they exult in the machine’s unstoppable power to smash through brick and flesh? Unquestionably, many of them display more regard for their dog than for any Iraqi or Afghan.

I think the main reason is that Americans are convinced, or at least tell themselves, that the devastation and suffering of these foreigners is the price that has to be paid for a higher cause. Residing comfortably in Americans is a deeply held belief that no matter what the United States does abroad, no matter what horror may result, no matter how bad it may look, the government of the United States means well. American leaders may make mistakes, they may blunder, they may lie, they may even on the odd occasion cause more harm than good, but *they do mean well*. Their intentions are always honorable. Of that Americans are certain. They genuinely wonder why the rest of the world can't see how benevolent and self-sacrificing America has been. Even many people who take part in the anti-war movement have a hard time shaking off some of this mindset; they march to spur America—the America they love and worship and trust—back onto the right track.

Another comparison worth pondering: Look at the US government’s preparation for the invasion of Iraq. For almost a full year the bases were set up, the airfields laid out, the tanks moved into place, the army hospitals readied for the wounded in Germany, the body bags inventoried, hundreds of thousands of military and civilian personnel assigned their spots and their duties, money being printed round the clock upon request, every “t” crossed, every “i” dotted, little left to chance . . . and look at the preparation for a hurricane hitting New Orleans, which was beyond the “if” stage, waiting only for the “when.” The empire has its priorities.

War is Peace, Occupation is Sovereignty

The town of Rawa in Northern Iraq is occupied. The United States has built an Army outpost there to cut off the supply of foreign fighters purportedly entering Iraq from Syria. The Americans engage in house searches, knocking in doors, summary detentions, roadblocks, air strikes, and other tactics highly upsetting to the people of Rawa. Recently, the commander of the outpost, Lt. Col. Mark Davis, addressed a crowd of 300 angry people. “We're not going anywhere,” he told the murmuring citizens. “Some of you are concerned about the attack helicopters and mortar fire from the base,” he said. “I will tell you this: those are the sounds of peace.”[1]

He could as well have said they were the sounds of sovereignty. Iraq is a sovereign nation, Washington assures us, particularly in these days of the constitutional referendum, although the vote will do nothing to empower the Iraqis to relieve their daily misery, serving only a public relations function for the United States; the votes, it should be noted, were counted on an American military base; on the day of the referendum, American warplanes and helicopters were busy killing some 70 people around the city of Ramadi.[2]

London also insists that Iraq is a sovereign nation. Recently, hundreds of residents filled the streets in the southern city of Basra, shouting and pumping their fists in the air to condemn British forces for raiding a jail and freeing two British soldiers. Iraqi police had arrested the Britons, who were dressed as civilians, for allegedly firing their guns (at whom or what is not clear), and either trying to plant explosives or having explosives in their vehicle. British troops then assembled several armored vehicles, rammed them through the jailhouse wall, and freed the men, as helicopter gunships hovered above.[3]

An intriguing side question: We have here British soldiers dressed as civilians (at least one report said dressed as Arabs), driving around in a car with explosives, firing guns . . . Does this not feed into the frequent speculation that coalition forces have been to some extent part of the “insurgency?” The same insurgency that’s used as an excuse by the coalition to remain in Iraq?

Afghanistan is also sovereign we are told. In July a statement by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—made up of Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan and its Central Asian neighbors—asked the United States to specify a date of its troop withdrawal from Central Asian bases on the ground that operations in Afghanistan were winding down. But in September we could read in a Washington Post report from Afghanistan: “The Soviets built a runway here more than 20 years ago to land fighter jets. The Americans, having pretty much worn that one out with their jumbo cargo planes, are building a new, longer strip meant to withstand the U.S. military’s heaviest loads. The construction, at the four-year mark in America’s military presence in Afghanistan, isn’t stopping there. Plans call for expanded ramps for fighter jets and helicopters, multiple ammunition storage bunkers and a six-story control tower, for a total bill exceeding \$96 million. An even more expensive airfield renovation is underway in Iraq at the Balad air base, a hub for U.S. military logistics, where for \$124 million the Air Force is building additional ramp space for cargo planes and helicopters. And farther south, in Qatar, a state-of-the-art, 104,000-square-foot air operations center for monitoring U.S. aircraft in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa is taking shape in the form of a giant concrete bunker. The \$500 million price tag includes a set of support facilities that would be the envy of any air force.

“All in all, the U.S. military has more than \$1.2 billion in projects either underway or planned in the Central Command region—an expansion plan that U.S. commanders say is necessary both to sustain operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and to provide for a long-term presence in the area.”[4]

There are of course areas other than the military which illustrate Washington’s continuing exercise of sovereignty over Iraq, areas such as those concerning multinational corporations. Sales of Iraqi assets and laws and decrees concerning deregulation, privatization, corporate taxes, etc. were promulgated early on by Washington’s Coalition Provisional Authority to make life easy for Halliburton and its partners in crime. These laws and decrees still remain in force and were set up to be rather difficult to amend. From all accounts, the new Iraqi constitution makes no mention of them.

And let us not forget: All Americans in Iraq, and all their allies, military or civilian, have complete immunity from any Iraqi law enforcement or judicial body, no matter what they do.

Clueless in Gaza

For some time now, the Pentagon has been fighting against the American Civil Liberties Union, members of Congress, and others who are pushing for the release of new photos and videos of prisoner “abuse” (otherwise known as “torture”) in the American gulag. The Pentagon has been trying to block release of these materials because, they claim, it will inflame anti-American feelings and inspire terrorist acts abroad. This clearly implies that so-called anti-Americans come to their views as a result of American

actions or behavior. Yet, the official position of the Bush administration, repeated numerous times and never rescinded, is that the motivation behind anti-American terrorism is envy and/or hatred of American democracy, freedom, wealth, and secular government, nothing to do with anything the United States does abroad, nothing to do with US foreign policy.[5]

In a similar vein, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes recently toured the Middle East for the stated purpose of correcting the “mistaken” impressions people have of the United States, which, she would have the world believe, are the root cause of anti-American hatred and terrorism; it’s all a matter of misunderstanding, image, and public relations. At her confirmation hearing in July, Hughes said, “The mission of public diplomacy is to engage, inform, and help others understand our policies, actions and values.”[6] But what if the problem is that the Muslim world, like the rest of the world, understands America only too well? Predictably, this confidante of President Bush (this being her only qualification for the position, just like Harriet Miers’s only qualification for the Supreme Court) uttered one inanity after another on her tour. Here she is in Turkey: “to preserve the peace, sometimes my country believes war is necessary,” and declaring that women are faring much better in Iraq than they did under Saddam Hussein.[7] When her remarks were angrily challenged by Turkish women in the audience, Hughes replied: “Obviously we have a public relations challenge here . . . as we do in different places throughout the world.”[8] Right, Karen, it’s all just p.r., nothing of any substance to worry your banality-filled little head about.

The Arab News (“The Middle East’s Leading English Language Daily”) summed up Hughes’s performance thusly: “Painfully clueless.”[9] The same could of course be said about Hughes’s boss (whom Harriet Miers has called the most brilliant man she has ever met).[10]

The Washington Post reported that: Hughes’s “audiences, especially in Egypt, often consisted of elites with long ties to the United States, but many people she spoke with said the core reason for the poor U.S. image remained U.S. policies, not how those policies were marketed or presented.”[11] Might she and her boss learn anything from this? Nah.

American Foundations and Dissent

Political science professor Joan Roelofs has a new book out on this long-neglected subject, “Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism.” Here’s a sample:

“Although Ford and other foundations had undertaken ameliorative measures, ‘malcontents’ started to spring up everywhere in the US during the 1960s. Foundation ideology attributed the radical protests to defects in pluralism. The pluralist ideology holds that any interest is free to organize and to obtain benefits from the system, through peaceful processes of compromise.

“Disadvantaged groups, such as blacks, Chicanos, women, children, and the poor, needed help in obtaining their rights. Grant money would enable them to participate in the interest group process on an equal basis with the more advantaged groups, and then they would no longer waste their energies in futile disruptive actions. Note that according to foundation ideology, the poor are just another minority group. Poverty, militarism, racism, and environmental degradation are not byproducts of the economic system or related to each other. They are merely defects to be corrected through the pluralist political process.”

More about the book can be found at: sunypress.edu/details.asp?id=60705.

A very interesting flowchart showing the flow of money from foundations to progressive media and other organizations of the left can be found at: LeftGatekeepers.com. For the latest information in this area send an email to Bob Feldman at bob_jan@xensei.com

Clarification

In the last issue of this report I attributed a statement about "loving" the American troops in Iraq to an ANSWER Coalition spokesperson. The statement was actually made by Mahdi Bray, the Executive Director of the Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation, which was an important member of the September 24 National Coalition and was made at an ANSWER press conference, but it should be pointed out that neither Mahdi nor his organization is a member of the ANSWER Steering Committee.

NOTES

- {1} New York Times, October 3, 2005, p.6
- {2} Reuters news agency, October 17, 2005
- {3} Washington Post, September 20, 21; al-Jazeera TV, September 19, 2005
- {4} Washington Post, September 17, 2005, p.18
- {5} See my discussion of this question at: <http://members.aol.com/essays6/myth.htm>
- {6} States News Service, July 22, 2005
- {7} Washington Post, September 29, 2005, p.16
- {8} Los Angeles Times, September 29, 2005, p.4
- {9} Washington Post, October 7, 2005, p.21
- {10} Copley News Service, October 10, 2005
- {11} Washington Post, September 30, 2005, p.12

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