

Not our Troops

Not our Flag, Not our Empire

Fifth Estate Collective

2003

They Create a Desert & Call it Peace: Welcome to the Occupation

With the horrible invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq threatening to expand to one or more of the other fifty-nine countries on the White House hit list, it's tempting to compare the imperialist lust of the Bush-Cheney regime to that of the Roman Empire in its earliest days.

The Roman foreign policy adopted after 150 BCE—called the “New Wisdom”—amounted to little more than the repeated, sustained use of brute military force to smash enemies and intimidate potential foes into preemptive surrender. By the time of the emperor Octavian Augustus, there was Pax Romana, the “Roman Peace,” a darkly humorous euphemism for maintaining stability, law and order through tyranny, savage militarism, and a strictly-policed State religion.

This state of affairs was probably best described by the Caledonian barbarian war chief Galgacus following Rome's military annihilation of his people and culture: “They create a desert and then call it ‘Peace.’”

However, given the unending waves of demonstrations and armed attacks against US troops (and their hand-chosen quislings) in places like Kandahar and al-Nasariya, it seems that the pacification necessary for a declaration of Pax Americana is still a long way out of reach.

Besides Imperial Rome, we can also compare US attempts to build an empire in southwest Asia to the most sprawling ambitions of 350 years of autocratic Russian colonial domination in the central and eastern regions of that continent. The neoconservative commissars who ideologically direct the US Executive Branch Politburo would have excited Stalin and Khrushchev with their fantasies of a ruthlessly-concerted State capitalist plunder of Asia's resources and of unchallenged geopolitical hegemony.

Since 9/11, at least thirteen new US military bases have been built in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia (War Secretary Rumsfeld vehemently denies that four more are being planned for Iraq), giving the US military an unprecedented access to the political landscape of south-central Asia and its largely (as yet) unexploited oil and natural gas reserves.

Before Bush, it was Brezhnev who had such an extensive first-strike military control over that region. However, a substantial difference exists between maintaining frontier outposts and airfields for the Pentagon and implementing imperialist political will. Globally, the US Department of Defense may be the world's largest landlord (with assets totaling 30 million acres, not counting Iraq). But, international outrage against the US government has never been so popular, so widespread, and so well-organized in Japan, Ireland, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Spain, South Korea, Italy, and many other places.

Recently, a US lieutenant-general in Iraq declared unequivocally that the invaders were the “absolute authority within Iraq”; former Iran-contra war criminal, death-squad apologist, and current US ambassador to the U.N. John Negroponte declared in a closed Security Council meeting in May that the US and Great Britain would be running Iraq as “occupying powers” for a year and probably much longer.

But even a child knows that saying something doesn't make it so; reports are beginning to leak out of Iraq that can no longer be painted with the bogeyman brush of "Saddam loyalists"—humanitarian catastrophes, cholera outbreaks, unexploded ordnance from US cluster bombs, and a dangerous lack of fresh water and electricity threaten life and limb. The war in Iraq is not over, nor will it be anytime soon, of this you can be certain.

A feature article in the *Fifth Estate* following the 1991 invasion of Iraq studied the flag-draped pep rallies and the millions of non-biodegradable, petroleum-based plastic yellow ribbons, and it asserted that "all of the rage and feelings of powerlessness, the miseries and humiliations of living in a society dominated by powerful and mostly anonymous forces such as the State and the market economy, are channeled into the partly choreographed, partly spontaneous fury against the external enemy." [See "These Are Not our Troops This Is Not Our Country," FE #336, Spring, 1991.]

In such a hothouse atmosphere, the threat existed for more wars, permanent wars, perpetual wars, "a string of these campaigns, of Vietnams, of Panamas, Nicaraguas, and Iraqs, a necklace of skulls hanging from the belt of the Warrior-Father of All Wars."

Twelve years later, the *Fifth Estate's* assessment of the excesses of rabid nationalism and "the permanent warfare State" has lost very little of its relevance: the "War Against Terrorism" is an endless war of the worlds. There are multiple, unilateral simultaneous wars being spawned by the likes of Richard Perle, Michael Ledeen, and the other noxious military-industrial celebrity spokes-models and think-tank pimps at the New American Century/Washington Consensus medicine show. These imperial serial killers envision pro-US "constabulary operations" that will produce and perpetuate the blood-drenched lie of American exceptionalism, the repugnant notion that there is something magically unique about the upper middle-class values that drive the US government and gives it moral and political superiority to all others as indispensable judge of paradigm for global peace and prosperity. (Failure of the international community to conform to the edicts of US national self-interest, therefore, requires the uber-power to take punitive action in the name of God and the good of humankind.). In 1991, the *Fifth Estate* cautioned that the "war for oil" was actually a "war for oil profits" that could be further interpreted as "a war for war, one which will continue to enshrine militarism as a key component in the US economy." This situation is obvious in Iraq today: after safeguarding the oilfields, murdering uncounted thousands of people, and pulverizing roads, affordable housing, hospitals, water treatment plants, and electrical grids, the CEOs of the Executive Branch awarded lucrative contracts to joint-stock carpetbagger corporations to re-stitch the urban fabric into commercial zones more immediately attractive to Wall Street speculators and the iron triangle of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization.

Always a tell-tale symptom of the most corrupt and vicious autocracies, crony capitalism is globalized by the shock troops of the New World Order—on May 9, Bush proposed the creation of a US-Middle East "free trade area" by 2013. Think of the most bloated and shady "urban renewal" boondoggles of the 1970s and 1980s in any major US city, or the archipelagos of maquiladora slums in Mexico, or the "free" enterprise zone sweatshops and grey-market factory-brothels for petty-bourgeois sex tourists in southeast Asia, and you'll get a hint of what this vision of the future holds for the "New Iraq."

In addition to being a war for oil profits, the Iraq invasion was also a war for the dollar-based fiscal control of the oil. Much of the motivation for the timing of the invasion was directly related to the macroeconomic machinations needed to protect the euro from replacing the US dollar as the currency standard for international petroleum transactions (a scenario not lost on antiwar street protesters in oil-rich countries such as Nigeria and Indonesia judging from the growing prevalence of "Euro yes! Dollar no!" slogans at rallies, according to an April report in *The Wall Street Journal*). Should OPEC move towards "petro-euros," the demand for US dollars would crash and cause US consumers to pay more for imported goods, adding an even higher level of inflation to the current wave of morbid capitalist spasms.

But with control of current and future Iraqi oil reserves (the world's second largest), new drilling in the Arctic, and help from their oil-executive stooges in Central Asia, South America, and Africa, the US could cobble together enough product to effectively bust the petro-euro menace in OPEC. It's no surprise, then, to see that the dollar is the coin of the realm in Occupied Iraq, not the euro used by most of the other members of the purported "Coalition of the Willing." (Long-time Midnight Notes Collectivist George Caffentzis adds important nuance to this interpre-

tation in his essay “A Note on the Euro Explanation of the War,” last seen on-line at the InterActivist Info Exchange on April 9.)

News from Nowhere

Empires exist through the extension of political will over others in a different place through military, economic, cultural, or administrative domination and exploitation. The resources, goods, and services extracted by imperialist rule flow along linked networks of communication and transportation; such networks are also used as a means of efficiently dispatching the technologies and tactics necessary for regulating and policing those living in an empire’s remotest corners.

Mass media syndicates broadcast the myths of technological enrichment, justice, stability, democracy and peace, and they normalize and legitimize US authority in ways that Cruise missiles cannot. The potential points of anti-imperialist intervention, therefore, exist everywhere along these mass-media networks.

Ever since the US bombing of Afghanistan, there has been talk about new government bureaus being set up that would monitor, regulate, and shape mass-mediated perceptions about what the Administration was up to. The Pentagon’s “Office of Strategic Information” was meant to spread lies to bolster US war policies; the US Department of State has an “Office of Public Diplomacy” whose job it is to convince people in other countries that the US is not a corrupt, war-mongering rogue State driven by oil companies and investment banks; the White House recently opened an “Office of Global Communications” to provide spin directly from the West Wing.

But when it comes to uninforming, misinforming, and disinforming the public with ruling-class Spam and patriotic porn, it’s the capitalist private sector that is leading the way, and it’s difficult to find a more odious perpetrator than the Clear Channel radio station conglomerate.

Clear Channel makes no effort to conceal the fact that it wants to be part of the Bush-Cheney Ministry of Information with its cookie-cutter formula of flag-waving, fundamentalism, and “freedom rock”; its kennel of talk-radio pit-bulls sponsored and promoted pro-war “Rallies for America” and masterminded boycotts of recording artists who tried to express anti-war sentiments. (Not coincidentally, Clear Channel is looking for a favorable ruling by the Federal Communications Commission that will allow it to seize control of the Hispanic Broadcasting radio station network and the Univision television system, thereby giving them 70% control of Spanish-language advertising revenue in the US)

But the ruling junta in the US relies on other apparatuses, too, like Fox News, CNN, PBS, NPR, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to produce, circulate, and distribute its symbolic imperial power.

One of the most notorious publicity spins of the war happened during the early days of the invasion when it seemed that the US military was blundering aimlessly around in the desert. Desperate for good news and patriotic poppycock, White House planners orchestrated the morale-building “rescue” of a perky blonde P.O.W. from a hospital. The dramatic (as in “drama class”) events, captured with night-vision video cameras on tape carefully edited by Pentagon officials, showed an all-star cast of commandos from every military branch crashing through doors, beating up doctors, firing up hospital corridors with machine guns, and “freeing” the Army private. Endlessly re-played on the nightly news, the rescue footage swelled the breast of every proud, knee-jerk patriot who had ever seen *Die Hard*.

However, un-embedded reporters from Britain and Canada proved that the raid was as prefabricated as professional wrestling; the hospital had been abandoned by Iraqi troops days before, and they quoted Iraqi doctors claiming that they had tried to turn the woman over to US troops earlier. Furthermore, her father and her doctor in West Virginia said that she had none of the multiple bullet or knife wounds that the Pentagon insisted that she had received during her interrogation. The soldier herself cannot clear up the matters, as she is apparently suffering trauma-induced amnesia.

Related to this was a lucid op-ed piece for a major metropolitan newspaper written a few weeks back by the liberal historian of technology Wolfgang Schivelbusch. The thrust of his argument was that there was a critical “absence of the vanquished” in the official iconography of Bush’s invasion of Iraq.

Without a symbolic show of the defeated leaders surrendering to the conquerors, he wrote, it becomes increasingly difficult to call the battle “won.” Schivelbusch suggests that the “military asymmetry” had a lot to do with the absence of images of surrendering Ba’ath Party leadership—one needs to go back five centuries to the slaughter and enslavement of the Aztecs by the firearms and steel swords of Cortes’s racist, Christian conquistador army to find a comparable mismatch:

“For Iraqi soldiers suffering for the second time in a dozen years the experience of being fish in a barrel, to disappear was the most natural and pragmatic thing to do.” But in disappearing so completely, the Iraqis thwarted the propaganda engines of the US Without photo-ops of a formal surrender by Saddam Hussein, or millions of obediently grateful Iraqis showering US troops with rose-petal confetti, or even a single chemical, biological, or nuclear warhead, the White House is denied any kind of symbolically rich “surrender-trophy.”

What Schivelbusch failed to suggest was that, in lieu of any useful “victory” images, the White House and Pentagon were forced into stage-managing clumsy hoaxes, such as the spuriously spontaneous demolition of a Saddam Hussein statue in Firdos Square, which was dutifully held up by corporate media as the iconography of regime change and democracy. Talk about a “captive audience”!

The de-pedestalizing of the statue was arranged for the day after US forces bombed the independent Arabic-language television news studios in Baghdad and happened in a central square across the street from the hotel where foreign journalists were staying. Closely cropped photographs of the square gave the impression of throngs, but the wide-angle view provided a much more telling account of this publicity stunt. So, too, we are shown the side-show spectacle of May 1—during the time-slot traditionally considered by television executives to be the most-watched hour of the week, no less—when Bush landed a plane on the deck of a Navy ship. (It’s since been reported that the ship had to be slowed down and turned around in order to prevent the California coastline to be seen in the live TV coverage and thereby preserve the illusion that the smirking Commander-‘n’-Thief was out in the middle of the Pacific.)

Rather than wait half an hour and board the ship in San Diego by gangplank, Karl Rove’s fixers brewed up a \$1 million prime-time reality-TV gimmick that abstracted the flesh and blood of sailors on board into pretty bunting to decorate an election campaign stop under a banner reading “Mission Accomplished.”

And it’s not just the Iraq War, but the class war, too: when Bush spoke last week to a hand-picked audience of 7,000 of his fedayeen party hacks in Indianapolis about his pro-plutocrat tax breaks, media consultants asked those seated behind the podium to remove their neckties so as to appear more like Regular Americans on TV.

For these reasons, and many others, we need to disrupt and hijack the supply lines of the information economy. Back in April, Kurt Vonnegut lamented that television in the US had become a form of government. If this is true, then television is a government that we need to overthrow.

Bush’s “Liberation” Theology

For us, perhaps the most grating aspect of the Iraqi invasion was the constant nattering about “liberating” Iraq by State functionaries, their mass-mediated apologists, and assorted yard signs and bumper stickers.

Let’s be clear: liberty cannot be imposed by someone else, least of all the US military with their cluster bombs and depleted-uranium artillery. The agents and the objects of any emancipation project must be one in the same in order for true liberty to be achieved.

Of course, the choice of language was a deliberate attempt to invoke the “liberation” of France in 1944, but even French libertarian socialists during World War II regarded this concept with great suspicion.

“The effort of liberation only coincides in a partial and fortuitous manner with the struggle for liberty. A quite formal distinction between these two terms is imperative today when some are preparing to take advantage of this confusion to the detriment of liberty,” the exiled poet Andre Breton wrote in Quebec following the D-Day invasion of Occupied France. “Liberty is not, like liberation, a struggle against sickness—it is health. Liberation might make us believe that health has been recovered, though it only signifies a remission of the illness, the disappearance of its most obvious and alarming symptom. Liberty itself eludes all happenstance.”

We cannot be freed, in other words, unless we free ourselves. Thus, Imperial storm-troopers may have “liberated” Iraqis from some aspects of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship, but they also “liberated” them from their lives, their body parts, their homes, their family members, and their petroleum reserves.

Liberation cannot substitute for liberty.

Given his regime’s profound distaste in even the most rudimentary forms of liberal democracy, Bush’s “liberation” rhetoric might be best understood in terms of a liberation theology that mixes a narrow view of social conditions with missionary Protestant praxis. Like so much of Bush’s thinking, his notion of “liberating” Iraq is anchored in a pigheaded moral certainty rife with dangerous simplifications and childish reductions.

It is a worldview shared by Islamic fanatics who plow planes into skyscrapers, of orthodox Jewish settlers who cheer armored bulldozers that bury people alive, and of televangelists like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson who profit from propagating sadistic Left Behind fantasies of apocalyptic miserabilism.

One of the most trusted religious advisors to the Bush Palace is Franklin Graham, who led a series of rather disturbing anointing prayers at Bush’s coronation ball in 2000 and has since been a frequent guest at the White House’s all-but-compulsory prayer meetings. Franklin Graham’s role as royal eminence grise marks the beginning of a second generation of the Graham Crusade industry’s involvement with White House cliques—Franklin’s TV preaching daddy, Billy, has been skulking around the White House for decades and can be heard encouraging nuclear war and spouting racist slurs on Nixon’s Watergate Tapes.

Among his other crimes against humanity, Billy is supposedly responsible for George W.’s born-again victory over whiskey, cocaine, and sinful fornication through indoctrination into the wrathful religious cult of unreconstructed Christian segregationists known as the Southern Baptists. Any analysis of the string of Bush’s intolerant and bizarre comments on non-Christian religions, abortion, education, and HIV-AIDS can be mapped onto the patriarchal authoritarianism of this ugly, fear-mongering sect.

On the Friday before Easter prior to the invasion of Iraq, Franklin Graham—who, incidentally, proudly claims to have chopped down a tree in his backyard in North Carolina with an automatic rifle—conducted a Christian religious service at the Pentagon in the room usually used by the handful of Muslims who work there for weekly prayer.

Such symbolic staging could not have been lost on Graham, who touched off a small controversy a year or so back when he described Islam as “a very evil and wicked religion” (not to be confused with the other evil, wicked, violently jealous desert monotheisms of Judaism and Christianity).

But with the beginning of Operation: Iraqi Freedom (TM), Graham, in that selflessly forgiving Christian way, has devoted himself and his Samaritan’s Purse charity organization to bringing humanitarian relief services to those victimized by the US war machine. Water, food, clothing, and shelter will be provided regardless of one’s religious affiliation, Graham has said, but he refuses to ignore the “spiritual needs” of those defeated heathens that his crusading charity serves. One wonders if there will be a place for the Grahams’ far-flung media empire on the new US-run State television network in Iraq.

This spring, the US government launched an Arabic language satellite TV news station for mostly Muslim Iraq. It is being produced in a studio run by fundamentalist Christians who are rabidly pro-Israel. Grace Digital Media is controlled by a fundamentalist Christian millionaire, Cheryl Reagan, who last year wrested control of Federal News Service, a transcription news service, from its former owner, Cortes Randell. Randell says he met Reagan at a prayer meeting.

Perhaps this is part of bringing “democracy” to Iraq, like when in late April, US troops opened fire on a group of peaceful Iraqi demonstrators near Baghdad, killing at least 13 people and wounding 75 others.

Those who study vicious religious ideologies point to examples like Graham’s power in US political circles and plans for the proposed evangelical invasion of the “Towards Freedom” channel in Iraq and argue that the Empire’s policies in the Middle East go well beyond maintaining the Israeli State as a de facto US aircraft carrier in the region. They say that there’s something else going on here that is far more creepy and supernatural, some sort of faith-based foreign policy involving a State religion being promulgated by the White House. This ideology has

roots easily traceable to the influences of the zealous pre-millennial dispensationalism of the Christian Dominion movement.

Generally speaking, Dominionites are hateful Christian extremists who brand themselves with the logo of the US flag while howling for their warrior God to smite the Muslim infidels. Followers of this sect pray daily for a “Shield of Protection” to cover the US, its military, and the State of Israel, as their eschatology dictates that the survival of the latter is crucial for the fulfillment of some biblical drivel about the Rapture.

According to these Christian fundamentalists, Jerusalem is the staging ground for Christ’s Second Coming, and therefore, it must never be allowed to fall into the hands of the Islamic devils. The Temple Mount mosque must be destroyed, and a new synagogue must be built there, a “Third Temple” that will set into motion the celestial mechanisms needed to usher Christ back into this world.

This catastrophic return will be an orgy of destruction and pain (which apparently involves the butchering of all but 144,000 Jews who, needless to say, quickly convert to Christianity) that finds the Righteous saved and the rest of us damned for eternity.

The degree to which Bush sincerely believes in this flavor of dogshit is immaterial for those of us dedicated to fighting for liberty. Whether Bush’s State religion is a hostile and self-serving application of Southern Baptism or a genuine devotion to its guiding principles makes no difference to those opposed to domination by God and the State, since the effects are going to be the same. During the height of the anti-war struggle, there were some anarchists who formed temporary alliances with Christian and Muslim pacifists in the interests of the Greater Good.

The activities of Bush and his Republican Guard remind us that those governed by religious ideas probably want to govern through religious ideas.

“The very nature and essence of every religious system is the impoverishment, enslavement, and annihilation of humanity for the benefit of divinity,” Bakunin wrote back in the day.

“Legislators inspired by God Himself, recognized as the representatives of divinity on earth, chosen by God Himself to direct humanity on the path to salvation, necessarily exercise absolute power. Slaves of God, men [sic] must also be slaves of the Church and the State, in so far as the State is consecrated by the Church.”

Little wonder, then, that “God, ever just, ever good, hands over the earth to the government of Napoleon the Thirds, of the Wilhelm the Firsts, of the Ferdinands of Austria, and of the Alexanders of all the Russias,” he concluded sarcastically. This is the same God, no doubt, that is also responsible for the Bush the Seconds, the Ariel Sharons, and the Houses of Saud that we are all cursed with today.

This is Not Our Country

Reports of hand-wringing, disillusionment, and resignation by everyone in the anti-war milieu for “failing” to prevent the invasion are greatly exaggerated. Anti-authoritarians will continue to confront the advancing imperialist project and its concomitant exponential increase in State and police powers. Among anarchists, autonomists, and libertarian socialists, the struggle continues as it always has since before Iraq and Afghanistan.

We remain thoroughly disgusted by nationalism, genderism, religion, racism, globalization, and militarism, and we resolutely will continue resisting the State and Capital by any and all means necessary.

In an article for the *Fifth Estate* following the 1991 war (and reprinted in his 1998 *Against the Megamachine* collection), David Watson agitated for revolutionary defeatism and sedition, urging readers to spread the word that “these are not our troops, this is not our flag, this is not our country” and to incite mutiny “if not against this war, which may end too quickly, then against the next.” [See “These Are Not our Troops This Is Not Our Country,” FE #336, Spring, 1991.]

For 2003, we at the *Fifth Estate* can think of no reason to change Watson’s appeal. The tools of imperialism are legion, and so too are the means for combating it—there is no facet of life and public affairs that can be uncontested space.

In the service of this goal, some readers will tactically unite with other global justice/ pro-democracy mass movements and instigate a broadening of critique, while others will bond in affinity groups or individually hone

commitments to absolute liberty and autonomy. But whatever form your struggles must take, please consider internationalizing these efforts. There are anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist organizations, movements, and individuals active outside of the Empire's center whose help and guidance we need now more than ever before.

Anti-imperialism will be innumerable constellations of creative, insurgent, preemptive actions, and tireless demonstrations of insurrectionary resistance. For the New Empire, let us become the New Barbarians.

fifth Estate

Fifth Estate Collective
Not our Troops
Not our Flag, Not our Empire
2003

<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/361-summer-2003-2/not-our-troops>
Fifth Estate #361, Summer 2003

[fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/361-summer-2003-2/not-our-troops)