

In Memory of a true hero and dear friend Philip Berrigan.

News Analysis
By Jake Asbin©.

If you alter the truth for your own ends, does that make it propaganda?

*"Truth has no special time of its own. Its hour is now--always.
Albert Schweitzer 1949.*

The initial investigation of the recently created September-11 commission must focus on the motivation of this atrocity and not exclusively on its execution and funding. This commission should not reiterate or become an Orwellian "official truth" echo-chamber for what has already been ascertained, or provide findings this administration deems the least damaging to the reputation of the United States. The commission should examine the true reasons behind an escalation of anti-Americanism in the Arab world--and whether this antipathy was a motivating and contributing factor.

The recent *Pew Global Attitudes Project* found citizens in 35 of 42 nations generally held a favorable view of America. But the number of respondents who felt that way declined in 19 of 27 countries where a trend could be identified, the report stated. The dislike was especially potent in Muslim countries of the Middle East and Central Asia. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed in Jordan had an unfavorable opinion of America, as did 69 percent of Egyptians and Pakistanis, and 59 percent of Lebanese.

Even strong allies like Germany, Canada and France have had unfavorable reactions to Bush's rush to war. These three allies, as well as many others, have stated their serious concerns over Bush's recent comment, that Washington is prepared to "respond with all our options" regarding future use of nuclear weapons, specifically "bunker busters" against Iraq if it were to use weapons of mass destruction against American troops or allies.

Some connections to terrorism originating in the Muslim world that targets the U.S. could be made by examining the current administration's lust for oil and an illusory foreign policy which advances that lust. Many administration officials claim American foreign policy is not about oil and insist that there are many beneficial foreign aid programs we are involved with. I agree there are some U.S. programs truly making a favorable difference, but to fund any future war(s) most if not all of these programs will be eliminated.

Informed Europeans have known for decades of the true "Achilles heel" of the U.S.--our insane levels of energy consumption, mainly in the form of petroleum to operate an incredibly inefficient automobile-dominated transportation system, Bush defends a continuation of this demented U.S. policy, which in reality in many parts of the world is as culpable in its own way as Al Qaeda's violent fanaticism is. There are strong indications that Bush is destined to portray Americans--if he hasn't already--as the real "evildoers" in the eyes of a growing part of the world community.

One can only hope damage done to the Middle Eastern community now can be repaired under a more compassionate administration in the future. Failed foreign policies by this administration which increases Arab anger also prevents comprehensive peace and safety for Israelis and legitimate statehood for Palestinians. Selecting Elliot Abrams--who twice lied to Congress 10-years ago in the Iran/Contra scandal-- as President Bush's

director of Middle Eastern affairs will only impede efforts for peace and raise apprehensions in the region.

In my opinion, Bush's actual political agenda is usually hidden from U.S. public view, but an examination of the real record is anything but reassuring. Will the 9-11 commission provide findings that really put closure on anything? Will the findings be truly independent? The apparently inevitable Chapter 2 of the war on Iraq will not provide the needed attention and resources for the real war on terrorism, but quite possibly will instead increase Al Qaeda's fanaticism, destabilizing the entire region and placing Israel in the crosshairs.

I will try to contain my escalating anger while explaining the following examples of Machiavellian U.S. foreign policy influenced by oil and the hidden costs we all will pay because of a war-for-oil mentality. (One of these costs is this president's insolent refusal to sign and ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which mandates lower emission goals and thus lower levels of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Another effect of the Kyoto treaty in the U.S., of course, would be to reduce our strategic dependence on fossil fuels and require investment in renewable energy sources.):

Afghanistan:

There are many reports surfacing that Unocal has proposed Afghanistan as the preferred path of its pipeline linking new drilling in parts of the former Soviet Union's Caspian Basin to Pakistani ports, from which it would be less expensive to transport oil and gas to American markets. Unocal's plans were conceived long before 9-11. Company representatives did in fact approach the Taliban when they were in power for their approval of this new pipeline project, and it has been widely reported that American oil company representatives also delivered funds to the former Taliban leadership ensuring their acceptance.

Osama bin Laden was recruited, trained, and funded under the Reagan administration's National Security Decision Directive. The Central Intelligence Agency, under former President George H. W. Bush's watch, funneled approximately \$6 billion to bin Laden and the Mujahadeen when they fought against the Soviet Union's invading forces. Even though Americans have repeatedly been told that this administration is not in the "business of nation building", it is "Nation Building" that America and its coalition partners are immersed in, right now, in rebuilding Afghanistan. Incidences of anti-Americanism and small hit and run terrorist attacks are on the rise in many parts outside the security of Kabul, the capital city.

Iraq:

Saddam Hussein is sitting on the world's second largest oil reserve. It was recently reported by *The Guardian* in England that "when we see American officials criticizing the weapon inspectors because they are not finding weapons of mass destruction or traces of a restarted weapons program, and the American press and media reiterate this to the public, you can expect the start of war very shortly." This prediction is beginning to take shape in some U.S. newspapers' pages.

Recently, Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor, made an unscheduled trip to New York to admonish Hans Blix, the United Nations Chief Weapons Inspector, demanding more aggressiveness from Mr. Blix and his inspectors, reported the *New York Times*. I personally think *Mad* magazine has it right with its recent Star Wars parody regarding this administration's rush to war as "Gulf Wars episode II, Clone of the Attack."

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts will lose \$2.58 billion in income taxes when the U.S. invades Iraq, according to the National Priorities Project, Inc., a Northampton Mass.-based progressive economic think tank.

The Bush administration has had nothing but contempt for previously released reports concerning human rights abuses in Iraq over the last two years. Suddenly and suspiciously the long-suffering of the Iraqi people at the hands of Saddam Hussein are now becoming priorities and of high concern to senior officials. These documented abuses have overnight grabbed headlines and soundbites from most senior administration officials and from White House spokespeople. But, these reports had been dismissed or ignored until only recently. Some people are still waiting for Condoleezza Rice's proof of Iraqi connections and sponsorship to Osama bin Laden and state-sponsored terrorism.

Saudi Arabia:

Fifteen of the hijackers were Saudi citizens. Much of Al Qaeda's finances have come from sympathizers in the Kingdom. Our military command was notified by Saudi Foreign Ministry officials that the US air base near Riyadh--from which future missions against Iraq would have originated-- might not be granted if used in any aggression against Iraq due to Saudi fear of regional instability. Recently, an investigation was launched to determine whether payments from Saudi Princess Haifa might have reached some of the 9-11 hijackers, reported *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Saudi officials have hired high-powered U.S. public relation firms to improve their image with the American public since 9-11.

Hypothetically, one could say this behavior, from what U.S. government officials have claimed is our closest ally in the region, would be unacceptable from a so-called friend.

Saudi Arabia controls the world's number one oil reserve. Bush has repeatedly stated America and Saudi Arabia are "very close allies and friends." He has also thanked the Kingdom several times for its help in combating terrorism, though the Kingdom's help has been dubious or insignificant to date.

Saudi Arabia is the largest single recipient of U.S. military and economic aid. Egypt and Israel follow closely behind. In the past, such aid packages stipulated that American-made weaponry would need to be purchased for the package to gain approval. Protests from Egyptian, Israeli, Palestinian and Saudi citizens in response to these weapons purchases brought suppression to the protesters. In late November, Israel discreetly asked the U.S. for approximately \$4 billion in new military aid and \$8-\$10 billion in loan guarantees to support its sagging economy.

However, Guy Caruso, head of the Energy Department's Energy Information Administration--*whose office prepared an "oil market contingency planning" book, based entirely on public data, which subsequently the Energy Department banned for release to Congress and the public.*-- stated in November that "the U.S. is failing miserably to curb its Saudi oil habit" and that the United States will continue to protect its interest in Saudi oil production. The United States is the world's largest importer and market for Saudi oil.

Colombia:

Since 2000, Colombia has been on the receiving end of \$1.8 billion in aid to combat narco-terrorism; to fund its 40-year war against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); to continue Dyncorp's (a U.S. company) program of aerial spraying of large areas of the countryside with highly-toxic herbicides under the guise of drug eradication; to arm law

enforcement; to purchase U.S.-made weaponry and to resume narcotics-interception flights that rely on data from American spy planes and satellites. Such interception flights were suspended last year after a plane carrying missionaries was shot down over Peru based on CIA mis-information.

This staggering amount of U.S. aid to Colombia also includes an additional \$100 million in funds to create a new Colombian army brigade, which the U.S. has supplied with Vietnam era helicopters to protect the 500-mile oil pipeline in eastern Colombia from guerrilla attacks. The pipeline transports oil for the Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum company, a large donor to Bush's presidential campaign.

Secretary of State Colin Powell on a recent trip to Colombia pledged an additional \$200 million annually over the next three years in military aid to fight terrorism.

The Drummond Company, a large Alabama coal mining firm, was recently sued over the killings of three Colombian union leaders. Terry Collingsworth, president of the International Labor Rights Fund--a Washington based advocacy group working with the United Steelworkers of America in its lawsuit against Drummond--said "we have evidence that the paramilitaries who killed the three union leaders were in fact working for Drummond." The paramilitary groups, accused of human rights violations by Amnesty International and other groups, and supported indirectly with American aid, have long been suspected in the murders of up to 1,500 union leaders over the past few years. This rise in political murders coincides with more American corporate investment during the same time-frame. There is also an increase of anti-American sentiment growing among Colombians.

Some historians and journalists have made comparisons to Colombia as "our next Vietnam" because of the behind-the-scenes role American military advisers, training Colombian forces, are playing. The term quagmire has reappeared, frequently, when discussed in conjunction with current U.S. military aid to Colombia. President Álvaro Uribe Vélez has proposed to triple defense spending, to double the number of professional soldiers and police, and to create a million-man civilian intelligence militia to gather information on the FARC guerrillas and their supporters.

During the 40-year saga of the government's civil war against FARC rebels, tens, if not hundreds, of thousands have died or disappeared, more than two million Colombians have been displaced and 27 million live below the poverty line. Oil production profits rarely trickle down to reach the masses because of government and industry corruption.

Venezuela:

The world's fifth-largest oil producer. The U.S. purchases more than 13 percent of its imported oil from Venezuela. There were numerous intimations from reporters and officials this past summer hinting that the Bush administration was somehow behind the failed attempted coup to overthrow President Hugo Chávez, because of his past anti-American statements and his references to American imperialism in South America. President Chávez is warmly received by Cuba's Fidel Castro, and the two countries share numerous trade and cultural agreements. President Bush has said this close alliance with Cuba (still enduring its 40-year U.S. embargo) is troublesome and irks some senior officials.

There is growing suspicion the CIA might possibly be directing or supporting, in its unique way, the rising anti-Chávez movement in Venezuela of recent weeks. Remember Chávez was reinstated president only after appeasing the wealthy and foreign investors' concerns and of his future intentions. The recent protests have resulted in gunmen killing some of the protesters and of Venezuelan military complicity. President Chávez has refused

repeated requests to step down, and his leadership might not survive much longer. The rich and middle-class hate him while the poor overwhelmingly support him.

Venezuela has been forced to stop oil shipments to the U.S. because of unrest and labor strikes. Presently, chaos reigns in the streets of Venezuela. How long before U.S. troops are sent to restart the flow of oil? What dubious justification will be given? What legal right will Bush claim so he can violate another oil-producing country's sovereignty?

Since 9-11, U.S. military presence has expanded to include the following nations: Jordan, where recent reports indicate that U.S. forces have regular access to Jordanian air bases; Kuwait, where Camp Doha has over 5,000 U.S. army personnel; Oman, where the U.S. is upgrading an airfield to accommodate everything from fighters to B 52 bombers; Yemen, where the Pentagon is exploring the possibility of building a signals intelligence base; Turkey, where we pay heavily for access to Incirlik air base because of its importance for future combat missions against Iraq; Bahrain, where the U.S. Fifth Fleet has headquarters; and Djibouti, where in September it was revealed that 800 U.S. personnel have been deployed. We also have entrenched military personnel in the nations of: Qatar, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Georgia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Diego Garcia, and the Philippines.

This then, must be why the September 11 Commission should resolve the "Why do they hate us?" question. They should be compelled to recognize that anti-American feelings in the Middle East have *EVERYTHING* to do with recent U.S. foreign policy. If we can't understand the rationale behind terrorism, or the terrorists' ideology, how could we ever hope to combat them? Vice President Cheney has called the war on terrorism "lifetime lasting." The Bush mantra of, "You are either with or against us" cannot possibly help our military find, capture or eliminate bin Laden.

In the days leading up to September 11, a government watch list of suspected terrorists or sympathizers had approximately 2,000 names on it. One year later, on the anniversary of 9-11, this same watch list now has over 70,000 names on it. Could this suggest that the U.S. is further alienating followers of Islam?

Considering the skepticism over Bush's inept nomination of former Secretary of State, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger to head this independent commission--Henry thankfully resigned because of conflicts of interest after only two-weeks. Remember, it wasn't that long ago that Christopher Hitchens uncovered evidence that seems to justify labeling Dr. Kissinger as a "War Criminal" because of his involvement in the military coup that brought former tyrant and convicted-in-absentia war criminal General Pinochet to power in Chile, his role in the Vietnam War, especially the illegal bombing of Cambodia, etc., etc., etc. The public must demand and expect that the new head of the commission not reject the data it uncovers because of its political affiliations or one-sided prejudices.

I wonder if the U.S. will truly win any war on "lifetime lasting terrorism"? How will invading Iraq impact our Arab allies? Will the reluctance of the Bush administration to enter into a real dialogue in the Middle East exacerbate matters? The never-ending cycle of atrocity followed by revenge, followed by more atrocities and new revenge must be broken. Americans, in short, must no longer tolerate corporate-influenced foreign policy which undermines our own nation's security.

As the only remaining superpower, America should explore changing course and begin setting the world's prominent example, one that the international community trusts and respects, of promoting dialogue and peace between nations. America should become

the foremost supporter for peace. We should be the defender of human rights, the rule of law and economic justice. Instead, this administration employs a disturbing pattern of intimidation while arrogantly posturing for unilateral "preemptive" war.

The present U.S. foreign policy which stipulates that all nations must acquiesce to American interests and hegemony demands a radical metamorphosis in order to guarantee true security and eventual victory over terrorism. Otherwise we will always have a bull's-eye-on-our-back mentality. What then becomes the future of our great and diverse democracy?

The war against Iraq is illegal and I don't want to be a law-abiding citizen in a law-breaking nation. Philip Berrigan, who burned draft records with homemade napalm, attacked a nuclear bomb with a jackhammer as a founding member of what he called "Plowshares actions" and was one of the foremost anti-Vietnam war organizers, once said that "U.S. military spending is the larceny of the nation's poor." I will forever passionately remember him.

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