

Analysis

American violence in Iraq: Necrophilia or savagery?

Part 4 of a 5-part series: **Obedience, defiance, and conscience**

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August 26, 2005—On the cover of its April 1994 issue, *The World & I* magazine printed the following question: “How violent is America?” On that occasion, the magazine was referring to US domestic violence.

On the index page, the editors expanded on the argument by placing under that same question the following introduction: “More people died in gunfire in the United States during the past four years than were killed in the Vietnam War. Finally, Americans have had enough. But how effective are the proposed solutions?”

More revealingly, on page 20, the magazine’s editor, Morton A. Kaplan, commenced the special essay on the topic by stating, “Violence seems to rule America . . .”

Since the magazine posed these questions on American domestic violence, we decided to transpose them from their domestic milieu to the wider horizons of US international violence: (1) How violent is America abroad? (2) How many people have America’s military killed around the world? (3) The world has had enough of US fascist violence . . . But are there any solutions? Finally, a fundamental question: Since violence rules America, is the US also ruling the world through violence?

Answer to question 1: America’s violence worldwide speaks for itself. From the destruction of the Originals Peoples of the United States to the inhabitants of Iraq, the US motivation to annihilate its designated enemy, to conquer, colonize, place under tutelage, or control foreign resources has not undergone any substantial change in over two centuries. Beyond that, the ideology of confrontation and violence appears to have cemented itself so deep in the American mind that some segments of the American people have become more overtly enthusiastic about war and conquest than the ideologues of empire themselves.

Answer to question 2: Wars directly after World War II: Korea, 3 million; Vietnam, 3 million; Panama, 4,000; Iraq (Gulf War: 400,000; sanction, 1.5 million, Operation “Iraqi Freedom” and ongoing occupation; over 128,000): 2 million; Yugoslavia, 24,000; Afghanistan, 20,000. If we add all those who the US indirectly killed by arranged military coups in Indonesia, Congo, Chile, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Latin America, and elsewhere, as well as all those Palestinian murders abetted through the largesse of US arms and “aid” to the Zionist program of ethnic cleansing and genocide, the number of people murdered worldwide as a result of militaristic US foreign policy implemented by its obliging soldiers is beyond count.

Answer to question 3: Yes, but proposing these, goes beyond the scope of this series. Suffice it to say, the solution requires immense and sustained sacrifice by the masses.

Answer to the fundamental question: Yes, America is ruling the world through violence or the threat of using violence.

Considering the entrenchment of ideological supremacy inside the American polity, is there any relation between the government's war options and the American people's response to them? Yes, a relation does exist. In fact, once the government goes to war for its own reasons, the American people, with the exception of a minority, approve of it, thus becoming extremely vociferous war activists through their uninformed opinions as reflected in opinion polls.

American violence seems atavistic in nature; i.e., inherited and transmitted from one generation to the next. This could explain why the system always defends the status quo. Nevertheless, throughout modern American history, the voices that opposed US imperialism and its violence have always remained an ostracized intellectual faction without significant mass movement that could stop or reverse US insanity in the world. In the case of Iraq, although the American people now know that US aggression is a product of deception, although many know about the tens-of-thousands of civilians that the US forces slaughtered in that hapless nation, the voices that rise up to stop that insanity are confined to progressive media and scattered fringes of the American society. Where are the American people and where are those mythical "values" that Bush fulminates about *ad nauseam*?

The Case Against American Imperialist Violence

Is there a pattern for premeditated US violence? The following quotation could shed some light on the matter. Seven months before 9–11, Donatella Lorch, a former writer for *Newsweek* wrote a premonitory article on America's march to *inventing* future wars and, of course, to necrophilia through war. She subtitled her article [1] in a warmongering fashion as follows, "In the Bunker, as the army's elite braces for a new enemy," where she described how the army was preparing for future wars. Lorch, of course, must have been privy to the Pentagon's planned wars and in what environment they are to take place. She wrote:

"The 135 men of Charlie Company, part of the Army's elite Ranger regiment, have to learn how to handle more than fire fights to prepare for the chaotic battle field of the future—*where civilians will be hard to tell from combatants* and the booby traps may include TV cameras. A *Newsweek* reporter and an MSNBC camera team tagged along on 'Operation Savage Strike,' a training exercise that stimulated the sort of real-life action. . . . The men seem to accept the ordeal, even in the wrinkles, like showboating reporters and difficult diplomats . . . They believe they are the Army's best, and *they say they want a real-life chance to show it.*" [italics added]

Exactly why do these soldiers want a real-life chance to show their homicidal prowess? Is it not sufficient that they show it only during the training camps? Must soldiers train so they can defend their country from foreign aggression or to go the world's "hot spots" as the US regime calls much of the rest of the planet, so they can demonstrate how violent is their imperialist determination to inflict death and destruction on people they have never met before?

How does all this apply to Iraq, now that those same 135 soldiers have eventually had the chance to show the murderous side of their personality?

Arguably, if the entire American state bases its foreign policy on violence, what should one expect from its soldiers? As for the US in Iraq, of course, it is not alone in committing atrocities; other "coalition" troops have been implicated in heinous acts as well. [2] When the highest level of power condones violence, violence tends to become an animalistic party for all. It bears mentioning, though, that some "coalition" partners have demonstrated reluctance to carry out directives of the US command. [3]

War philosopher Carl von Clausewitz held that "to introduce into the philosophy of war itself a principle of moderation would be an absurdity." [4] Historically, war brings out the darkest side of humanity, but there are guiding principles for warfare and its prevention. [5] Does that mean people have to accept US violence because war brings out the darkest side of humanity? Based on observation of US reactions consequent to the torture of prisoners in Iraq, the establishment and its media condoned it and declared it a tiny manifestation of bad behavior by only a few bad apples and not a manifestation of a deep-rooted aberration in the American establishment where military and civilian commanders planned it from the top.

Those people who maintain that in times of war the troops must have “our” support are logically deluded. For one matter, the same rationale must be applicable to the population of the enemy. By such reasoning, one could not and should not hold the population of the enemy state accountable for the state’s violence. Furthermore, by the same reasoning, one would have and should have expected Germans to support Adolf Hitler and his Nazi fighters. Applying this rationale to the current batch of US troops would require Americans to support them despite their war crimes: torture, atrocities, looting, and the savage plunder of another land.

Why then, one wonders, did the US invade Iraq: to rid it of weapons-of-mass-destruction, to oust Saddam Hussein, or to stop his atrocities? By now, it is widely known that these are just pretexts. So is there any other rationale? There is also the “noble” cause of neocons Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle to promote “democracy” in the Middle East through the invasion of Iraq. If so, how many other non-democratic lands will the US invade to install democracy? China? Just how can the US call its election in Iraq “democracy” when it prescreened and selected all candidates based on their allegiance to the occupation regime?

The pressing question remains: Is the transfer of the source of atrocities from the hands of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to the hands of the occupiers an acceptable alternative because atrocities are now being committed under the auspices of a “democratic America?”

To answer all these questions, one must scrutinize the way in which US politicians, media, and the American people treat the occupation and the atrocities of US soldiers in Iraq. The US atrocities in Iraq are of three types: (1) the pre-invasion rhetorical violence, (2) the invasion as a supreme act of fascist atrocity, and (3) post-invasion and occupation atrocities. While most media ignore the first two types, they always minimize the third.

It is edifying to observe how the establishment’s magazine, *Time*, treats the third type of atrocities. *Time* declared the American soldier the magazine’s “person of the year” for 2004. On this issue, war journalist Chris Hedges wrote, “It is part of war’s perversity that we lionize those who make great warriors and excuse their excesses in the name of self-defense.” [6] He added, “Many young men, schooled in the notion that war is the ultimate definition of manhood, that only in war will they be tested and proven, that they can discover their worth as human beings in battle, willingly join the great enterprise. The admiration of the crowd, the high-blown rhetoric, the chance to achieve the glory of the previous generation, the ideal of nobility beckon us forward.” [7]

While Hedges described war in psycho-epical terms because it “gives us meaning,” the reality is that although conditioning attempts to bring about a uniform obedience, the military is not a monolithic body that one can school in any precise notion. For whatever reasons a soldier initially enlisted, afterwards some discover that life in the military was not what they originally thought it would be. The carnage and mayhem that the US has inflicted on Iraq and Afghanistan have undoubtedly adversely affected some service personnel. Many are starting to question why they are in Iraq. One enlistee insisted, “I never signed up to kill fathers, mothers, children. Otherwise, if we had scrupulously followed military procedures, Iraq would be empty!” Others have even ridiculed the crucial notion of an al Qaeda-9/11-Iraq connection. [8]

There are signs also that the tide is turning against the war venture, as recruitment is becoming increasingly difficult. [9] The US military has even desperately headed north to try recruiting Inuit and First Nations people in Canada. [10] Financial enticements aimed at Latin Americans are being used to plug the recruitment gap. [11] The Army wants to double the top cash bonus for new recruits to \$40,000 in an effort to stem recruiting losses. [12]

In addition, replenishing troops for Iraq has become increasingly difficult to do, as many US soldiers refuse to return to Iraq. US soldier Jeremy Hinzman is one of an estimated 6,000 deserters—150 of whom have defected to Canada rather than “kill babies.” [13] Hinzman told of conditioning meant to dehumanize the designated enemies. Recruits were compelled to chant: “What makes grass grow? Blood, blood, bright red blood,” and “Train to kill, kill we will.” During training, he said, “We were on the

run, singing cadences about raping and pillaging.” It is eerie that one does not hear more often serious concern from the trainees and the trained because of their training. [14]

One US Fallujah veteran, Jim Talib, told of a directive to shoot detainees and described the “medieval display” of dead Iraqis strapped to a car hood like trophy deer. Said Talib, of the situation in Iraq: “So much of what I experienced seemed out of control, I saw so little respect for the living and almost none for the dead, and there was almost no accountability.” [15]

The reality is that there is nothing inherently greater or less great about a soldier. Soldiers are humans and their capacity for good or evil is a result of their sense of humanity. The US military in particular, seeks to condition soldiers in a way that removes them from this sense of humanity. In response, many people propose that the antiwar movement should not militate against the soldier but seek to educate them in the principles of the movement. Is this proposal possible?

Some may think so; but the fact is that there is a diametric contradiction between enlisting to fight and preserving a sense of compassion or humanity. Practically, it is impossible to retain the two at the same time: war is about killing. In other words, how can one carry out the principles of being antiwar while she is conducting a war? The only way that such a thing could happen is when a soldier stops being a soldier; that is, when he deserts the army. Desertion is one legitimate “out option” for troops coerced to violate legal and moral principles. While deserters are typically classified as cowards, the truer cowards are the troops who violate conscience by shooting at unarmed civilians. It requires far greater courage to refuse orders to perpetrate abominations and to attempt escape from the most powerful military in history. Under these circumstances, deserters are certainly not cowards but rather heroes of morality.

Some soldiers prefer to stay in the US to face whatever “justice” the military metes out for their refusal to take part in the US atrocities committed abroad. Camilo Mejía, an imprisoned conscientious objector who refused to report for return duty in Iraq said, “It wasn’t until I came home that I felt it—how wrong it all was and that I was a coward for pushing my principles aside. I’m trying to buy my way back into heaven . . . and it’s not so much what I did, but what I didn’t do to stop it when I was there. So now it’s a way of trying to undo the evil that we did over there. This is why I’m speaking out, and not going back.” [16]

US Army Sergeant Kevin Benderman concluded that the fighting in Iraq was immoral and it was his duty to refuse to kill. Benderman’s bid for conscientious objector status failed as the authorities refused his application. [17] One can only surmise that the panel that summarily dismissed Benderman’s petition must have been ignorant of former US president John F. Kennedy’s lament: “War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today.”

Harvey Tharp, who served in Kirkuk, declared, “Most of what we’re talking about is war crimes . . . war crimes because they are directed by our government for power projection. My easy answer for not going is PTSD . . . but the deeper moral reason is that I didn’t want to be involved in a crime against humanity.” [18]

The military is not about conscience. Willful or unwilling obedience to engage in the act of killing cannot be a matter that attracts people based on conscience. Those service personnel who carry out war crimes as commanded are guilty. Coalition Provisional Authority Regulation Number 17, however, bars prosecution in Iraqi courts of “coalition” soldiers. The US, in further contempt of international law refuses to recognize the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. This grotesque defiance of international law contradicts the declared pretext for the aggression of Iraq: the lethally phony assertion about Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction in contravention of UN Security Council Resolution 1441. In the end, the UN, itself, is complicit in the undermining of its very own *raison d’être* through complicity with the aggressors of Iraq. [19]

Next, in the final part of this series: Is the United States a torture nation?

ENDNOTES

- [1] Donatella Lorch, "Tomorrow's Fire Fight," *Newsweek*, 15 January 2001, 33
- [2] Press release by Amnesty International, "[Human rights watchdog details the killing of civilians in Iraq by British armed forces and armed groups](#)," *Spotlight*, 11 May 2004.
- [3] Frank Walker, "[Our pilots refused to bomb 40 times](#)," *smh.com.au*, 14 March 2004. Australian and other "coalition" pilots have been aborting bombing runs often, reportedly, to avoid killing civilians. It seems that there were "fundamental differences between the US dominated headquarters and Australian pilots over what constituted a valid military target." Daniel McGory, "[US heavy-handedness baffles British](#)," *News.com.au*, 3 April 2003. British troops were depicted as aghast at the egregious behavior of US troops: "The Americans are still behaving like invaders, not liberators. They behave as if they hate these people."
- [4] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Wordsworth Classics, 1997), 6
- [5] John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (Vintage, 1993), 388. Confucianism is a philosophy that seeks to constrain the warrior instinct to law.
- [6] Chris Hedges, *War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning* (Anchor Books, 2003), 8
- [7] *Ibid*, 84
- [8] Told by Joshua Key, written up by Annick Cojean, "[Zombies in the Fog of War](#)," *Le Monde*, 24 July 2005. As one deserting soldier related, "Imagine you're at home back in the States, in the middle of drinking a beer. And then we show up at your house in the middle of the night. You'd go crazy, right? You'd fight back! You'd want to kill everybody! Man, if it was me, I'd want to do things a thousand times worse than what they have." Steve Fainaru, "[For Marines, a Frustrating Fight. Some in Iraq Question How and Why War Is Being Waged](#)," *Washington Post*, 10 October 2004. Lance Cpl. Alexander Jones spoke of catching the US government "in a lie." Cpl. Brandon Autin was unfazed about possible punishment for speaking out: "We don't give a crap. What are they going to do, send us to Iraq?"
- [9] Bud Deraps, "[Dying in Iraq is not a career choice](#)," *People's Weekly World*, 25 May 2005.
- [10] James Ridgeway, "[Uncle Sam Wants You, Eh? Our Military Tries to Recruit Canada's Inuit](#)," *Village Voice*, 24–30 December 2003
- [11] Dave Moniz, "[Army bonuses may rise to \\$40K](#)," *USA Today*, 10 June 2005
- [12] Diego Cevallos, "[Fewer and Fewer Latinos Willing to Die in Iraq](#)," *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 31 May 2005
- [13] "[Military Deserters Flee To Canada](#)," *WESH.com*, 26 May 2005
- [14] Joseph Kay, "[US soldier seeks refugee status in Canada](#)," *World Socialist Web Site*, 11 December 2004
- [15] Quoted in Ignacio Ramonet, "[London, twinned with Baghdad](#)," *Le Monde diplomatique*, 1 August 2005
- [16] Quoted in Dahr Jamail, "[What Have We Done?](#)" *Iraq Dispatches*, 5 August 2005
- [17] Robert S. Finnegan, "[Conscientious Objector Status for Army Sgt. Kevin Benderman Denied: Ft. Stewart Command Quickly Rubber-Stamps Disapproval](#)," *Dissident Voice*, 29 April 2005

[18] Quoted in Dahr Jamail, op. cit.

[19] Salim Lone, "[An uprising in support of democracy: By backing the US over elections, Kofi Annan inflamed the Iraq crisis](#)," *The Guardian*, 13 April 2004

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