Mission Accomplished

Why Bush is Counting on the Islamic Resistance

CrimethInc.

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[Preface added October 15, 2023] When this text was published in Rolling Thunder #3 in 2006, it was received as imaginative speculation. Seventeen years later, it looks prescient in several regards. It foreshadows the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, predicts the extension of the label "terrorist" to ordinary ecological and social justice activists in the United States, and foresees how the situation in Palestine presaged further ethnic conflicts and the mass repression of oppressed populations around the world. While the central thesis of the text remains unproven in regards to the administration of George W. Bush, there is adequate evidence that the government of Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel did indeed cultivate the power of the Islamic fundamentalist party Hamas. "Anyone who wants to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state has to support bolstering Hamas and transferring money to Hamas," Netanyahu told a meeting of the Likud party's Knesset members in March 2019.

When this text originally appeared, it was described as a follow-up to "Forget Terrorism: September 11 and the Hijacking of Reality," which appeared in Rolling Thunder #1.

Today, an internet search for "Mission Accomplished"—the text on the banner that hung behind Bush on May Day, 2003, when he announced the purported end of major military operations in Iraq—turns up countless smug editorials from liberal and left-wing pundits crowing about the bloody resistance to the subsequent occupation. Don't get them wrong, they're not enthusiasts of armed struggle—they're the first to oppose even the mildest forms of resistance here in the US; they just love to see things go wrong for their political opponents. However many civilians die in autonomous as well as state military operations, the important thing is that rival demagogues get egg on their faces, as this increases the chances of power shifting into their willing hands.

Anarchists, too, have largely interpreted the civil war in Iraq as a debacle for Bush and his cronies, sometimes to the point of endorsing it without bothering about what the insurgents are fighting for. Yes, it is healthy for every person living under others' power to resist; unfortunately, this does not mean that all who do so struggle against "power over" itself. Over the past year, some of the violence in Iraq has become more reminiscent of the ethnic strife in mid-twentieth-century India than of an anti-imperialist liberation struggle.

Regardless, everyone still assumes that this violence runs counter to Bush's designs for the area. At the risk of venturing into conspiracy theory, let's take a moment to consider an alternate scenario. What if the Iraqi resistance is not unforeseen after all, but a potential outcome the Bush regime took into account—perhaps even the one they were counting on? This seems counterintuitive, as every statement they've made since the beginning of the war has given us to believe that they expected the post-Saddam opposition to be short-lived. But if we want to avoid nasty surprises we'd better allow for the possibility that our rulers aren't as obtuse and inept as they seem.

What, if anything, would the Bush administration stand to gain from replacing the iron rule of Saddam Hussein over resentful

claiming our opposition to the system. This is another function of militant anarchist struggle in the US: to bring the war home to such an extent that it can no longer be framed as an us-versus-them conflict with foreigners, but becomes instead a confrontation between classes within this country.

To prepare for the years ahead, we should study the past decades of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as it forms the blueprint for the new world order. The fact that it has proved irresolvable thus far makes it a promising model for protracted global war... but should anyone hit upon a way of undermining that impasse, however so slightly, it might be a starting point for an escape route out of this whole mess.

For further perspective on the way adversaries help to prop up authoritarian regimes, we can consult Orwell's 1984, in which a totalitarian government relies on a state of perpetual war to maintain its control. The ideal enemy is unable to win, but always able to threaten, so subjects neither feel too safe nor too fearful. The ideal enemy is a mirror image of the government, so subjects who might find fault with their rulers are more outraged by their enemies: if the government is willing to sacrifice innocent life, the enemy must be even more callous in doing so; if the government promotes a superstitious, repressive creed, the enemy must fight in the name of an equally superstitious and repressive belief system. The ideal enemy must provide excuses to justify the repression of internal foes, but must be different enough from those foes that there is no need to fear the two finding common cause.

For the empire of global capitalism, ethnic/religious terrorism is the perfect foil. A rival empire would pose an obstacle to global domination, but terrorists can threaten everywhere without ruling anywhere. Only cold-blooded terrorism can make the humiliations of capitalist exploitation pale in comparison; only terrorist aspirations to power can make the rule of plutocratic demagogues seem preferable.

as things stand right now, Osama bin Laden and George Bush stand to gain a lot more from this conflict than the rest of us folks do. The specter of US imperialism will no doubt enable hierarchical groups in Muslim communities to strengthen their hold over others, just as terrorism has enabled Bush to consolidate his power here. We need to figure out who our allies are overseas—who fights for liberty, self-determination, and mutual aid there as we do here—and do all we can to support them.

To make it easier for people elsewhere to feel that there is hope for such a struggle, so they don't settle for joining up with the lesser of two evils themselves, we need to fight hard here at home. This is one of the anarchist solutions to the problem of foreign totalitarianism: if we can sufficiently undermine our own rulers, foreign powers won't be able to justify their terror and tyranny by pointing to the threat our tyrants pose.

Above all, we must seize from Bush and bin Laden the initiative to define the contests of our day. As long as the principal global conflict is conceptualized as "Democracy versus Terrorism" or "the West versus Islam," it will be increasingly difficult to mobilize struggles on other grounds for other objectives. If we hope to join great numbers of people in the US and abroad in a war against hierarchy rather than each other, we will have to frame and popularize new dichotomies.

In this sense, it is significant that the US government is taking advantage of the current climate to portray activists who have nothing to do with militant Islam as terrorists. Once enough US citizens who have nothing to do with Al Qaeda are branded with that epithet, the fault lines of conflict will be drawn within this society, rather than between it and another, and it'll be a whole new ball game. Should the overzealous FBI carelessly push things past this threshold, their repression might actually help make it clear to everyone that the most important battles transcend nationality and religion; but for that to be possible, we'll have to be tireless in supporting our targeted comrades and fearless in openly pro-

Iraqis with chaos, civil war, and resentment against the US? The costs of this exchange are obvious: it makes the US government and military look incompetent, thus decreasing the Republican Party's chances of winning the next election, and it facilitates Islamic fundamentalist recruiting.

But perhaps the last of these effects is not so undesirable. Bush's regime derives much of its popularity from the feeling that the country is under attack; it's hard to imagine where he'd be now if not for the attacks of September 11, 2001. It's not so much of a stretch to hypothesize that, consciously or not, he and his colleagues are pursuing a course of action that will reinforce their position by strengthening their enemies.

Islamic jihadist groups are certainly better situated today than they were six years ago. The September 11 attacks were the work of a small number of people, and the culmination of years of effort; now, with a nationwide insurgency to participate in and cull recruits from, not to mention a global atmosphere of anti-Muslim persecution, militant Islam is steadily gaining stature. At that time, it was diffcult for such groups to attract notice outside parts of the Middle East; now, they need only carry out one major attack a year to remain the center of international attention. Back then, they had only managed to kill a few thousand people; tens of thousands have perished in the ensuing wars and inquisitions—and for terrorists, it is the net total of violence and horror that determines their influence, not the way their losses and gains compare to those of their adversaries.

If further evidence were wanting, Hamas, one of the most militant parties in the Middle East, has now come to power in the Palestinian government via the 2006 elections. This is the inevitable consequence of the US government pursuing a foreign policy that gives the Palestinians no reason to trust its commitment to peace or justice. The accession of Hamas to government power gives the US and Israel further excuses not to work towards peace, which in turn will push other Palestinians and Arab groups to take sides

against them. This feedback loop of escalating conflict can only lead to more and more violence.

Some years ago, I saw a survivor of the Palestinian occupation speak. She maintained that in their air strikes and assassinations, the Israelis often deliberately targeted organizers who were willing to negotiate towards a peaceful resolution rather than the ones most committed to violence, presumably in order to render diplomatic solutions impossible. If her claims are true, they correlate well with other policies of the Israeli right wing, which also seem designed to provoke terrorism by stomping out any other form of resistance to Israeli injustices.

We must consider the possibility that a long-term foreign policy objective of the Bush administration is to provoke and promote Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. This would explain the otherwise senseless invasion of an incapacitated nation governed by a secular dictator loathed by Al Qaeda; it could explain the seemingly botched handling of the subsequent occupation, and the current wrangling with Hamas and the Iranian government. By destabilizing entire regions, driving Muslims across the world to rage and despair, and closing off all possibilities other than autonomous acts of terrorist violence, Bush and his colleagues hope to create a new adversary for the sequel to the Cold War.

The Iraq war was not about oil alone; as the hawkish party, the Republicans need adversaries even more than they need world domination. Like the Israeli right wing, they benefit from conflict: they know that however much people complain between elections, as long as there's a war on, voters will fall in line behind them when it's time to cast ballots, since the opposing party lacks the credentials for wartime leadership. By a process of natural selection, they have come to pursue policies that tend to get their supporters shot down, blown up, and kidnapped, because these unfortunate effects drive more supporters into their arms.

Mere world domination is no use to a repressive regime. As soon as there are no barbarians at the gates to point to as the

greater of two evils, the subjects start getting restless—witness the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall, when internal resistance grew and grew in the vacuum left by the Communist menace. War-without-end may make people restless, too, but it also keeps them busy reacting to it, if not dying in it, instead of cutting to the root of the matter.

Years of perpetuating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are paying off: militant Islam, once a backyard startup company, is finally a global threat, poised to replace the Communist Bloc.[1] Western-style capitalism has extended its influence and control so far that external opposition must now come from previously peripheral corners of the world, such as Afghanistan; a few fanatics from that periphery were enough to inaugurate the new era of Terror-vs.-Democracy back in 2001, but it will take a lot more fanatics to maintain, and the current US foreign policy will produce them. The Republican Party may lose the next election as the result of public dismay over the untidiness of the Iraq occupation, but so long as they succeed in setting a long-term worldwide conflict in motion first, they can count on returning to power soon enough.

If all this speculation is correct, where does that leave us anarchists, who also struggle against global capitalism? First, we should be hesitant to cheerlead militant Islamic resistance, except when we have reason to believe it will produce anti-authoritarian results. Solidarity with all who oppose oppression is critical for the anarchist project, but the enemy of our enemy is not always our friend:

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[1] It's interesting to note that one of the factors that helped bring about the end of the Soviet Union was a protracted war with Muslim radicals in Afghanistan, which the latter won in 1989—the year the Berlin Wall came down. In that regard, militant Islam literally replaced communism as the supposed antithesis to Western capitalism. A year later, in a surprise decision to oust former ally Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, the US moved forces into the Middle East; predictably, this outraged Al Qaeda—which had formed in Afghanistan during the war with the Soviets—and the rest is history. It's almost too convenient for the purposes of this analysis that the CIA spent the 1980s funding and training some of the same Muslim fundamentalists that went on to top their most-wanted lists.