



## The new world order of things

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**T**hese are truly fearful times that we are living through. In the United Nations, attempts to arrive at a diplomatic resolution of the crisis continue apace. The choreography of process serves little though to conceal the absolute certainty of outcome. The script of this war was crafted in Washington many months ago. In the next few days, the full military might of the world's sole remaining superpower will be unleashed on the beleaguered peoples of Iraq. As the regime of the erstwhile western client Saddam Hussein falls, the dawning of a new era of democracy will be hailed. With a compliant regime headed by the US military safely installed the cavalcade of American state terror will move on to bring untold horror on the benighted residents of some other misbegotten state. New world order, same old slaughter.

**I**

The inauguration of George W. Bush as President of the United States was read in many quarters as heralding a new era of American isolationism. The refusal of Washington to recognise the Kyoto Accords on global warming was interpreted widely as being indicative of an administration that had little concern for the broader currents of international affairs. The view that this was to be an isolationist Presidency was, however, fundamentally mistaken from the outset. Those who masterminded the putsch that saw Bush come to power were intent not on

withdrawing from the world but rather on reigning supreme over it.

The ideological zeal of the present US administration stems in the main from the energies of a small band of neo-liberal fanatics who founded the Project for the New American Century. Since its creation in 1997 this think tank has endeavoured with enormous success to ensure that American foreign policy assumes a more unilateralist and expansionist form<sup>1</sup>. In the latter years of the second Clinton term, the Project for the New American Century sought to exercise influence from beyond the immediate circle of political power. The accession

of Bush to the White House, however, enabled the senior figures within the pressure group to assume direct control of the principal offices of federal government.

The ideological credentials of the Bush administration were of course fairly explicit from the outset. It was not until the horrors of September 11th 2001, however, that the full scale of the imperialist designs of those who stole the last Presidential elections became entirely apparent. The pledges of the Project for the New American Century had consistently argued that the overwhelmingly military supremacy of the United States should be employed to ruthlessly pursue what they understood to be the 'national interest'. The terrorist attacks in New York and elsewhere instantaneously created an ideological climate that enabled this radical political agenda to be pursued with greater vigour and ease. Before the dust of the twin towers had even settled the ideologues at the helm in Washington began to quicken the pace of the campaign to realise their dreams of Empire.

In the last eighteen months, US foreign policy has predictably assumed a distinctly unilateralist and aggressive form. The renewal of American imperialism has entailed a number of strategies, three of which are drawn out here for closer examination. Firstly, Washington has increased efforts to undermine those institutions and practices that threaten to set limits to its power. Since the needless slaughter of September 11th 2001, those who frame US foreign policy have sought to systematically undermine the authority of the network of bodies that

ostensibly governs the conduct of international relations<sup>2</sup>. The organisations that were formed to ensure the prohibition of chemical weapons, the non-proliferation of nuclear arms and the free flow of trade have all buckled recently in the face of American belligerence. Perhaps the most significant global institution though to have invoked the ire of a singularly aggressive White House is the United Nations.

In recent months, the seemingly obsessive desire of the United States to manufacture a war against the people of Iraq has been frustrated by the insistence that an alternative diplomatic solution be sought through the offices of the UN. The Bush administration has countered that were the UN Security Council to fail to endorse American aggression against the regime of Saddam Hussein it would lose all 'relevance' in the regulation of international affairs. In the event of such an outcome, Washington has pledged to go to war in any case supported by its principal cheerleader in Downing Street. The pursuit of a unilateral war on the part of the United States would represent an enormous challenge to the authority and purpose of the UN. The imminent carnage in the Persian Gulf will inevitably produce a great many casualties. It is entirely possible that what remains of the credibility of the United Nations will be among them.

Secondly, the architects and advocates of contemporary US foreign policy have set out to exploit and reproduce the climate of fear that has inevitably attended the crimes that al Qaeda operatives committed against

American civilians. Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic have been consistently at pains to establish that western countries remain vulnerable to the fanaticism and ingenuity of Islamic terrorists. The dire warnings issued by the White House and Downing Street have often moved beyond the realm of legitimate statements of public interest and into that of blatant scare-mongering. The stationing of troops and tanks outside the terminals of Heathrow airport, for instance, served no discernible practical purpose in terms of the deterrence of terrorism. The practice might be best considered, therefore, as a matter of performance—as an attempt to play out risks that may or may not exist in order to inflame the anxieties of the public. The reproduction of this climate of fear serves of course to facilitate the interests and actions of the powerful. A generalised sense of anxiety almost inevitably tends to manufacture consent among citizens for those draconian measures that politicians deem necessary in the face of the threat of terrorism.

While the manipulation of popular fears has been used to ensure the compliance of the general population, rather more oppressive measures have been employed against those who have withheld their consent from the political establishment. In the United States, the discourse of patriotism has been used to legitimise practices that abuse the civil rights of ethnic minorities and political dissenters. In the United Kingdom, a Labour administration has chosen to derogate from a provision of the European Convention on Human Rights in order to be able to intern immigrants suspected

of terrorist connections. In the Irish Republic, draconian public order legislation has enabled the state to harass and arrest activists voicing criticism of the government's decision to allow American troops and aircraft to pass through Shannon airport. The experiences drawn from these three societies have of course been echoed across the western world. The charged atmosphere that has followed the traumas of September 11th 2001 has encouraged and enabled the powerful to clamp down on political opposition. It would appear that those neo-liberals who run the world and who claim to cherish the freedoms of the individual are in fact of the view that the cause of liberty can only be advanced by withdrawing it from those who choose to withhold their consent.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the reinvigoration of US imperialism has entailed a seemingly irreversible drive to war. In the last eighteen months, the American military has expanded its already enormous budget and its range of operations. There are US bases in places now that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago. The American military has established footholds throughout most of what was previously the Soviet Empire. The various states in the oil-rich and strategically important region that adjoins the Caspian Sea are host to US troops. In eastern Europe at the moment a range of former Stalinist states are falling over themselves to attract US military bases. The order of things that obtained during the dismal decades of the Cold War has truly been stood on its head.

The ostensible rationale for the militarization of the United States is

the conviction that attack represents the best form of defence. In the wake of the September 11th 2001 atrocities, the Bush administration declared that it had initiated a 'war on terror'. Those who had carried the attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon would be hunted down and eliminated. Those preparing to commit similar obscenities would meet the same fate. Only through the ruthless military pursuit of foreign terrorists—Washington counselled—could it be guaranteed that there would never be another September 11th.

## II

Given that the 'war on terror' was intended to seek retribution from those who had assisted in the attacks on the twin towers one might have expected that the military power of the United States might have been turned first against the countries from which the hijackers came. In practice though, the Bush administration chose to overlook the connections to the atrocities of its client regimes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt and opted instead to wage war on a country already decimated by a quarter century of it. That the brief campaign in Afghanistan should have been heralded in the centres of imperial authority as a roaring success is perplexing given that none of its stated objectives were in fact attained. Although seriously disrupted, the al Qaeda network remains stubbornly intact—a reality offered chilling confirmation by the subsequent atrocities in Bali and Kenya. The influence and appeal of its leader, Osama Bin Laden,

have been merely heightened by his ability to remain one step ahead of the American military.

The sole meaningful 'achievement' of the war against Afghanistan—a campaign that claimed twice as many civilian lives as the felling of the twin towers—was the ousting of a Taliban regime whose accession to power had originally been greeted with delight in Washington. The relatively swift fall of Kabul was heralded in the western media as a major accomplishment in the 'war on terror'. In reality, however, the overthrow of the Taliban had not been an original aim of those who supported the military assault upon Afghanistan. Indeed, the airforces of the United States and the United Kingdom had been dropping munitions for more than three weeks before the ambition of regime change in Kabul was even mentioned for the first time.

The excursion of the United States and its allies into Afghanistan was heralded in the courts of imperial power as a humanitarian intervention that would in time and on balance enhance the lives of people living there. This bullish reading hardly squares though with the actualities of the Afghani experience. The place men installed to run the country conduct themselves in a manner that barely accords with the rudiments of democratic practice. While the condition of women has admittedly improved in some respects it hardly amounts to the wholesale liberation that we were promised when John Simpson of the BBC 'liberated' Kabul. The festering ethnic divisions within the country are among the many

considerations that suggest that the near future of the people of Afghanistan will, like their recent past, be one of war and humanitarian crisis. The mess that the United States and its sidekicks have compounded and created in Afghanistan adds to the growing list of indictments of the conception and conduct of the so-called 'war on terror'. In the case of Afghanistan, the intervention of the western military served merely to replace one bunch of drug-dealing, woman-hating fundamentalists with another. If that is what constitutes a victorious instalment in the 'war on terror' then we can only shudder at the prospect of what a defeat might entail.

### III

The next name that appears on the seemingly endless roster drawn up by the fanatics that exercise power in Washington is inevitably that of Iraq<sup>3</sup>. The unrepresentative minority that advocates war in the Persian Gulf seeks to legitimate this course of action in the terms of Enlightenment values. The lexicon of civilisation is plundered in order to justify actions that amount to nothing more than sheer barbarism. The official line held by the religious fundamentalists who control the White House and Downing Street emphasises that Saddam Hussein is a murderous tyrant who possesses weapons of mass destruction and who would not hesitate to use them against 'us' at an opportune moment. The threat that the regime in Baghdad poses to the security of western states and indeed to the security of the world

as a whole is sufficiently grave—the hawks in Washington, London and Madrid insist—that there is no alternative but to remove it from power.

People on the Left will scarcely need reminding that the rationale for war that the likes of Bush and Blair have sought to advance fails to stand up to even the most cursory examination. When it is in their own strategic interests, countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have no compunction when it comes to arming and supporting the most heinous tyrannies. The hypocrisy of those who claim to be champions of the noble causes of 'peace' and 'democracy' really is quite breathtaking. It is very difficult to listen to the criticisms of Saddam Hussein that issue routinely from the White House when we know that the United States is unstintingly generous in its support for the butchers at the helm of government in Colombia. It is equally difficult to have to hear Tony Blair emote about the perils of weapons of mass destruction when we are aware of the precise nature of the exports that his government approved to the likes of Indonesia and Zimbabwe. And, finally, as an Irish person it is really quite nauseating to be lectured by the current Taoiseach about the dastardly nature of the regime in Baghdad when it is common knowledge that Bertie Ahern held office in a Fianna Fail administration in the late 1980s that was quite content to supply beef at taxpayers' expense to the Iraqi army.

The claims of the hawks that they are motivated by the most sacred values of western civilisation should then be simply laughed out of court. If the

imminent slaughter in the Persian Gulf is not in fact motivated by a concern for democracy and human rights then what is it all about? The first answer that the Left tends to offer is—understandably and probably rightly—that the war in Iraq is being driven by the desire of the United States to control the global supply of oil. The inauguration of George W Bush as US President meant that the connections between the White House and the big oil corporations are more intimate now than they have ever been before<sup>4</sup>. The successful colonisation of Iraq would place the United States in a position of dominance in a country that possesses the second largest reserves of fossil fuels in the world. When the regime of Saddam Hussein falls, the most lucrative contracts for the extraction and export of oil will of course be awarded to American corporations, who will in turn stump up the cash necessary for Bush to run for a second term. The contract of mutual interest and benefit that conjoins the golden circle of greedy white men that runs the world will have been reaffirmed.

The principal ambition of those who advocate the use of the United States' military power against Iraq is the prosecution of the 'national interest'—a threatening enough metaphor that actually translates more accurately into an even more menacing concern to advance the interests of a narrow range of corporations. While the oil men who comprise the Bush administration are clearly driven by the desire to make lots of money for themselves and their friends they are also prompted by another secondary and perhaps even subliminal ambition.

The intention of those who propose the use of military force to overthrow Saddam Hussein is, in part at least, to create the conditions that promise to sustain and nurture a flagging global economy. The current drive to war is therefore informed by concerns that are at once both particular and universal—by the desire for profit of the US oil corporations and the desire for expansion of the wider capitalist system within which they operate. The current phase of American foreign policy might be accurately characterised then as being not only 'imperialist' but also—to employ a distinction offered by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri—'imperial' (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

While the imminent conflagration in Iraq will explicitly advance certain material interests it will also acknowledge the value of the symbolic. In the next few weeks, the states of the Persian Gulf will provide a stage for the performance of American military power (Amis, 2002). In view of the distinctly symbolic nature of this war, the role of the media will be even more crucial than it was twelve years ago. The nature of the television coverage in particular will not merely represent the conflict but constitute it as well. We will of course only be able to watch the next instalment of the Gulf War because it is actually happening. But it might also be said that the next instalment of the Gulf War is only happening in part because we are able to watch it.

The conduct of the military campaign is intended to induce feelings of 'shock and awe' not only among the residents of Baghdad and Basra but among the wider audience viewing at

home. While the assault upon Iraq will be many things it will perhaps above all be what Seamus Milne has termed a 'war of example'. As the cruise missiles, cluster bombs and daisy cutters rain down upon an Iraq people already terrorised by tyranny, war and sanctions (Ali, 2002), the insurmountable military supremacy of the United States will be played out for all the world to see. The lessons that we are intended to draw from this baleful performance of power should be fairly self-evident. The war about to be waged against Iraq is designed to establish that anyone who crosses the United States can expect swift and unavoidable retribution. In light of the overwhelming power of the US military, all resistance to the dictates of Washington becomes futile and perilous. The only reasonable strategy that remains is—the authors of the new imperialism would have us believe—to abandon pointless resistance to American hegemony and retreat into a state of deference and fear.

#### IV

The last few months have witnessed increasingly heated disputes among erstwhile allies about the legitimacy of resuming hostilities in the Persian Gulf. The increasingly fraught nature of diplomatic relations within the 'international community' reflects the gravity of the crisis that a war on Iraq would mark. The most serious consequences of proposed military action would of course be faced by the Iraqi people. In late January, the United Nations and the medical charity

Medact drew up estimates of the human costs of a military campaign intended to topple Saddam Hussein. The figures make chilling reading<sup>5</sup>. According to the organisations mentioned above, a war would result in the deaths of as many as 86,000 Iraqi civilians and would leave 500,000 others in need of serious medical attention. The impact of the bombing would also ensure that 3.6 million people in Iraq would be made homeless, a further 2 million would be displaced within the country and some 900,000 would be forced to flee abroad. The publication of these sobering statistics drawn from reliable sources has of course done little to deter those in Washington and London who have long made a fetish of going to war against their former client in Baghdad. Apparently the people of Iraq are to be 'liberated' even if it means that they have to be slaughtered and displaced in their droves in the process.

While the immediate consequences of the war will inevitably be felt most severely by the residents of Iraq, the repercussions of the conflict will be experienced far beyond the borders of that unfortunate nation. In the longer term, the many victims of this next instalment of the Gulf War will inevitably include many US citizens. The ostensible purpose of the 'war on terror' is to eliminate actual or potential threats to the United States so as to ensure that there can never be another day like September 11th 2001. The dreadful irony of the current direction of US foreign policy is that it is likely to result in precisely the opposite outcome.

While the attacks on the twin towers and elsewhere were clearly unjustifiable it would be a mistake to dismiss them as being merely senseless. The sentiments that animate organisations like al Qaeda articulate a sense of grievance widespread throughout the Islamic world at the conduct of US foreign policy. The steadfast financial and ideological support that Washington has offered Israel in its oppression of the Palestinians is viewed as particularly iniquitous. The renewal of American imperialism will inevitably serve only to foster the already palpable sense of grievance and resentment that the abuse of US military power has created within the Muslim world and indeed elsewhere. The aggression of Washington will inexorably nurture that sense among Islamic fundamentalists and others that the only meaningful response to US hegemony is through the use of force. It would seem likely then that the belligerence of the supposed 'war on terror' will in effect invite those very tragedies it was designed to prevent. One of the many dreadful legacies of the imperialist project pursued by the Bush administration may well be a further sequence of unpardonable terrorist attacks upon a civilian population in the United States that did not even choose to elect him.

The repercussions of the forthcoming war in Iraq will in time impact upon a great many countries that are not even a party to the conflict. It has been obvious for a while that there are no limits to the imperial ambitions of those who, under the convenient veil of democratic process, organised the coup that swept George W. Bush into

power (Anderson, 2002). The people who run the White House want to run the world—no matter how long it takes. Ever since September 11th 2001, the principal hawks in the Bush administration have expressed their willingness and desire to wage a 'war without end'. Key players such as Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz are unabashed in their belief that in future American foreign policy should consistently assume the form of direct armed interventions in pursuit or defence of the strategic and corporate interests of the United States. Their objective is nothing less than complete military domination of the entire planet.

Given the scale of the imperial designs of those who have the ear of the President, the conflict about to break over Iraq begins to assume even greater significance and even more sinister hue. The prosecution of what would—in the twisted definition of Washington—be a 'successful' war in the Persian Gulf would strengthen the forces of reaction in global affairs. When the United States goes to war, it will do so in the face of overwhelming popular and diplomatic opposition all over the globe. The demise of Saddam Hussein will therefore simply heighten the conviction of the hawks in Washington that they have the will and the capacity to act more or less alone in the world. When the United States goes to war, it will in all probability employ its fearsome military resources to sweep aside Iraqi defences in a few days. A swift and successful campaign will merely confirm the conviction of those in the Pentagon who believe that political disputes can be resolved through force of arms.



The lessons that the politicians and the military in the United States would draw from a 'victory' in Iraq would alter the already perilous balance of global forces in ways that would make the world an even more dangerous place. The relatively easy seizure of Baghdad would nurture the existing sense in Washington that the security and interests of the United States are best defended by unilateral military interventions abroad. Emboldened by 'success' in the Persian Gulf, the architects of the New American Century would be more willing and able to wage war on the unfortunate peoples of other states. The corpses about to pile up in Iraq would be multiplied time and again in conflicts in every other corner of the globe. We were promised a new world order. But the closer you look the more it resembles a new dark age.

## V

With all the gloom that currently shrouds global affairs it would be easy and understandable for us to descend into despondence. It should be remembered though that every time of crisis is also a time of opportunity. While the last few months have been deeply dispiriting they have at the same time of course been profoundly heartening. The clearly obsessive desire of the likes of Bush and Blair to bring further terror and torment to the residents of Iraq has summoned the opposition of ordinary people all over the world. On February 15th millions marched to voice their opposition to war in what turned out to be the single largest simultaneous political demon-

stration in human history. The magnificent turnout in London was reflected in cities across the globe. In Dublin we had the largest demonstration in a generation with 150,000 taking to the streets to express their disgust at the obsequious and underhanded support of the Irish government for the American war drive.

The groundswell of popular opinion that we saw a month ago has of course proved insufficient to dissuade Bush and Blair from their chosen course of waging war against Iraq. The clear contempt in which Washington and London hold the views of the vast majority of the population of the planet should only serve to heighten the resolve and energies of those who oppose the ambitions of the new imperialists. Only a genuinely global and radical anti-war movement can resist and depose those who would seek to rule the world in the interests of capital and themselves. While we cannot claim victory in this particular battle over the fate of Iraq, that only makes it all the more imperative that we win the war against war. The alternative outcome is far too dreadful to even contemplate.

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## Notes

1. George Monbiot, 'To crush the poor', *The Guardian* February 4th 2003.
2. *ibid.*
3. Milan Rai, *War Plan Iraq*, Verso, 2002.
4. Alex Callinicos, 'The grand strategy of the American Empire', *International Socialism* 97, 2002
5. Jonathan Steele, 'Counting the dead', *The Guardian* January 29th 2003.

## References

- Anderson, P. (2002) 'Force and Consent', *New Left Review* 2:17, pp. 20-30.
- Hardt, M. and Antonio N., *Empire*, 2000, Harvard University Press, p.182.

# THE LAST NIGHT LONDON BURNED

This 64-page full colour book is a tribute to the late Joe Strummer, whose last London gig in November 2002 was a benefit for the Fire Brigades Union hardship fund.

Contents include a biography of Joe, a look back at the origins of punk rock, a history of The Clash (from London and New York perspectives), a tribute by Mark Steel and a background essay on the FBU strike. Photo credits include some of the best of the punk era plus a series taken on The Last Night London Burned.



The Last Night London Burned costs £5, all profits go to the FBU Hardship Fund. It is available either by post from the London Region FBU, by sending a cheque/postal order for £5.50 (inc. p&p), made payable to the 'London Region Hardship Fund', to Linda Smith, FBU London Region, 1 John Horner Mews, London N1 8PB, or from a number of book/record shops. Nationally from Fopp records, in London from Bookmarks, Bloomsbury St, WC1; Housmans, Caledonian Rd N1; Helter Skelter, Denmark St, WC1; Selectadisc, Berwick St, W1; Rough Trade, Covent Garden, WC2 and Talbot Rd, W11.