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Subject: "U.S. government objectives in Iraq"  
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By John Chuckman  
YellowTimes.org Columnist (Canada)

I won't listen to, or read, the news of the war. The only news I want to hear is that the murder is over.

Murder? Yes, that word is carefully chosen.

I can easily imagine how the expression "shock and awe" was born. Remember, in America, marketing comes before anything. Everything from breast cancer treatment to Jesus is loudly marketed in this bizarre society. That's not even a slight exaggeration, although if you haven't lived there, you'll have to take my word for it. They are busy marketing terror, insecurity, and xenophobia right now, and that makes your chances of visiting to research questions of this kind not very good.

If you're a full-blooded American, marketing murder, even mass murder, is just like marketing anything else. You can't be squeamish about it. You need a good turn of phrase or slogan, an eye-catching logo, and perhaps some stirring theme music. You need what will convince jaded consumers that something new and exciting is about to appear on their television screens. The need is greater than ever now that entertainment and information have been fully merged on American broadcasting -- broadcasting, by the way, owned by a remarkably small number of people, all of whom just happen to share the same interest in keeping the Pentagon's furnaces stoked with four hundred billion dollars a year.

I imagine platoons of Pentagon consultants, each earning hundreds of dollars an hour, coming and going for months before the war with their expensive laptops in designer leather cases, making presentations of their marketing proposals, each hoping to land the big contract. Then one day someone stunned the crowd with a super presentation of just the right concept, "shock and awe," with plenty of special effects guaranteed to play well on television.

It can't be that none of the creased-pants innocents in the Pentagon ever heard of the Western Front in the First World War where truly horrifying bombardments, with guns that could shatter your eardrums if you were too close, sometimes went on for days before the troops jumped the tops of their trenches and charged the barbed wire of the other side across fields raked with heavy machine guns and cratered by shell holes where mustard gas lingered like a poison fog ready to blind and burn out the lungs of anyone unfortunate enough to stumble in.

Of course, these bombardments were aimed at soldiers, not at a city like Baghdad, but perhaps I quibble.

Americans don't fight that way anymore. Actually, since Vietnam -- where they were sent running even after they managed to napalm a good portion of the nation's villages -- Americans don't fight at all. There have been attempts to re-institute the practice here and there, as in Mogadishu, but the results weren't happy -- a few dead soldiers and America turned and ran. Of course, it didn't

have to be that way if they hadn't muddled a humanitarian mission with the urge to mow down every local who looked at them the wrong way. Maybe they just hadn't done enough focus groups and marketing surveys before that sour-smelling little mission.

Now, America simply commits mass murder with computer-controlled weapons from a safe distance and calls it fighting. When the explosions and screaming stop and the brave American lads set out on their mission of occupation from air-conditioned quarters (they don't do trenches anymore) in their air-conditioned armored cars, dressed in bullet-proof Kevlar suits and equipped with sun-tan lotion and freeze-dried linguini, there isn't a lot for them to do but avoid slipping and falling in the human gore splattered everywhere by missiles and high-tech bombs. They also must remember to don their bubble-boy suits and respirators in areas saturated with tons of vaporized depleted uranium.

There's very little risk to the "boyz" -- all of whom, regardless of steroid-induced, bovine bulk and savage-looking buzzed-off hair, are affectionately regarded as awkward, young Ricky Nelsons (at least, before his cocaine phase), who always say things like "sir" and "aw, heck."

I've written before about the approaching age of American high-tech Puritanism, but I didn't expect it to be upon us so completely quite so quickly, reminding one of the sudden onset of a new ice age. America is able to destroy anyone or anyplace it finds displeasing or just suspicious -- this is Sharon's Israel occupying Palestine on a global scale.

No consultations with others are needed, or if Americans do briefly consult, it will be a marketing ploy taken in full confidence they are free to ignore everyone and push them aside, even when this happens to include, as it does in the case of Iraq, most of the world's people.

In hopes of gaining some outward show of respectability, this time America conducted a very unpleasant behind-the-scenes campaign of threats and bribery. Again, that is not an exaggeration, that is how they obtained that pathetic list of thirty countries not one in ten Americans has ever heard of, but, even then, most of these places are not joined in the killing, just signaling support in some diffuse way as a response to pressure from the world's economic pituitary giant.

When you really think about it, who else could join in the killing? Who else is equipped for long-distance computerized murder? But America always looks to others to occupy and police, relieving the "boyz" even of these tasks.

You might think that if there had been any true case for war, it would be obvious to more of the world's leaders. Why would you need all the browbeating and threats? But the case was not obvious, because some very bright people in the U.N. Security Council, all in fact friends of the United States, thrashed it out and could not agree. Mostly, all they wanted was time and patience for inspections. But Mr. Bush, gifted intellect and learned scholar that he is, knew better than all of them, and besides, in the Texas he comes from, all that matters is that you have the biggest fists or are first out with your gun.

Maybe next time, America will feel it can dispense with respectability. It really got very little for its effort. That's what America's frighteningly rat-like neocons are telling us with their talk about a damaged U.N. and Atlantic Alliance. They just neglect to mention that it is the U.S. that did the

damage.

We all know what Lord Acton said about power and absolute power. His words remain perhaps truer than anything ever uttered about human behavior, and they should serve as a warning, but I fear they provide only consolation. Just imagine a world where it has become possible to slaughter any number of people, virtually with impunity -- a world where that kind of power is in the hands of a relatively small group of narrow, earnest, self-satisfied people possessing virtually limitless material resources and believing themselves somehow guided by God as no one else on the planet is privileged to be.

It's a dismaying picture of the future, but if you are watching or listening to the news about Iraq from the Pentagon's just-built, custom-designed, super-deluxe, press-conference studio, you're getting a first hard look at that very future.

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