

A Clash of Fundamentalisms

Written by Richard Greeman
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In our previous articles we emphasized the ideological nature of today's problematic Islamic 'threat'. (See ['Islam in the Western Imagination'](#) and ['Urgent Threats of Yesteryear'](#) .) Historically this 'threat' fits into an established tradition of hysterical propaganda campaigns – whether against 'Indians', 'Negroes' or 'Reds' -- which distort and exaggerate real and potential challenges to U.S. capitalism / imperialism so as to justify violence, state terror and wars of plunder.

If the truth is 'the first casualty' in war then democracy is the second. Although framed by the U.S. in terms of defending (or spreading) 'democracy', today's East-West conflict turns out to be not so much a Clash of Civilizations as an ideological Clash of Fundamentalisms. While hyping the threat of 'Islamic Fundamentalism', U.S. media and politicians conveniently fail to point out that their own outlook is based on the same kind of reactionary hard-shell fundamentalism as 'Political Islamism'. Let's call it 'Political Christianity'. The Christian right in the U.S. aspires to the same kind of theocratic domination over government and peoples' private lives as the Ayatollahs. Its members speak with the same hysterical absolutist certainty, believe the ends justify the means, and are willing resort to violent means – like murdering abortion-providers and bombing women's health centers. Both fundamentalisms offer identity and community to the disaffected masses while silencing opposition and bullying the hesitant through fear. The Zionists and the Jewish Religious Right are equally ruthless, and recently the U.S. Christian right has overcome its traditional anti-Semitism to form a reactionary pro-Israel, pro-U.S. alliance with right-wing, pro-Zionist Jewish organizations and leaders like the notoriously Jewish Senator Lieberman – much to the dismay of the vast majority of liberal, secular U.S. Jews.

In this upside-down ideological world, the U.S. the domestic War on Terror seems to be aimed exclusively at hunting largely imaginary conspiracies among American Moslems and peace activists -- to the exclusion of actually-existing white racist militias and violent rightwing Christian networks which operate with impunity. Thus, when the domestic terrorist Tim McVeigh, an avowed member of a network of right-wing Christian militias, bombed the Oklahoma City Federal building killing 168 people and seriously injuring 800 more, there was no broad conspiracy investigation or round up of suspects. Today, Christian anti-Choice organizations openly incite violence by posting "Wanted" posters of 'Murderers' (abortion providers) on the Internet including the names and addresses of their families. The same groups regularly terrorize women's health clinics harassing personnel and prospective clients,

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all with impunity. And no one spoke of 'terrorist conspiracies' when the saintly Dr. Tiller was gunned down in his church on a Sunday by a member of one of these fanatical anti-abortion organizations.

Under George Bush, the 'threat of Islamism' myth was evoked to justify the U.S.'s routine, brazen use of 'secret' torture on captured Moslems. Of course, this torture was 'secret' only to the U.S. media and public, not to the victims, their families and the rest of the world. Arabic broadcasters like Al Jazeera gave U.S. torture-camps a big play all over the Moslem world. Machiavelli writes that cruelty is only useful as a deterrent to enemies if it is well-publicized. If letting potential 'enemy combatants' know the fate awaiting them if captured by the Americans was the goal of the U.S. torture program, the 'intelligence' community achieved it at the price of alienating a billion Moslems and eradicating any residual pro-American feelings dating from 11th September 2001.

The irony is that such 'enhanced interrogation' methods have proven notoriously useless for actual intelligence gathering, since people will say anything under torture. Yet the torturers and their superiors in the Bush Administration who sullied America's reputation and who violated U.S. and international law remain unpunished. The new President was made to understand that the U.S. may need these guys in the future and so his Administration decided not to 'look backward' only forward! Forward to what? More useless 'intelligence'? Further degradation of the image of progressive, liberal, Western democratic values exemplified by kidnappings, torture chambers and brutal concentration camps like Abu Graib? As we shall argue in our next piece, such extreme methods are evidence of desperation.

With the oil-wars escalating and with U.S. and British voters less and less enthusiastic about paying for them, there is a need to ratchet up the pitch of anti-Moslem hysteria so as to 'stay the course' in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and now Pakistan and Yemen. Given this ideological drive, it goes without saying that knowledge of the history, politics, sociology and even the languages of these threatening 'others' would only get in the way. In fact, the CIA and State Department actually dismissed their staff of Arabic-language translators years ago, when 'human intelligence' was replaced by spy satellites which capture megabytes of important information in Arabic which the Americans can't read.

Who said: 'Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make blind'? Are not ideological constructions like the 'terrorism' the blinders rulers put over their own eyes and the eyes of their subjects when they embark on a fatal course of hubris?

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