

Leave No Oil Reserves Behind, Including Iraq's: The Geopolitics of American Imperialism

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Abstract: Just war theory needs to become a realtime critique of government war propaganda in order to facilitate peace advocacy *ante bellum*. This involves countering asserted justificatory reasons with demonstrable facts that reveal other motives, thereby yielding reflective understanding which can be collectivized via electronic media. As a case in point, I compare here the publicly declared reasons for the US/UK invasion of Iraq in 2003 with reasons discussed internally months and even years before in government and think-tank documents. These sources show that control of oil was the underlying motive rather than regime change or a WMD threat. Certain Bush Administration neo-conservatives justify such deception by citing an exoteric/esoteric distinction traceable to Plato via Leo Strauss. As with the Iraq invasion so in general such propaganda and its rationalizations can be undermined by investigative journalism understood as ranging from fact gathering to rhetorical analysis and critique.

Getting at the real issues involved in a violence-threatening conflict can help facilitate peace, according to Edward Said, provided it reaches beyond rhetorical reasons for political violence to the underlying motives, thereby achieving what he called reflective understanding.¹ Reflective understanding is, of course, no panacea; but in concert with mobilized opposition it can make a difference. This coordination of concern will not come about, though, if the real motives uncovered are not revealed to the people, in the language of just war theory, *ante bellum*. To illustrate this thesis I will consider a clear example of underlying motives that were not widely disseminated in time, namely, those associated with the so-called Operation Iraqi Freedom. Had this been done, it would have facilitated reflective understanding of that homicidal endeavor. But it was not, due to a combination of political deception, media lethargy, and Americans' illusions about the durability of their petroleum-based way of life.

No knowledgeable analyst of US energy needs has any doubt that Americans' wasteful consumption of hydrocarbons cannot continue unchecked without inflicting devastating consequences on the environment, the economy, and the unconscionably profligate American way of life. This has been understood, with varying degrees of alarm, at least since the days of Jimmy Carter and the OPEC oil embargo. Carter at least proposed conservation as an appropriate response. But a quarter of a century later, with the situation incomparably worse, conservation is treated like a quaint anachronism. And the George W. Bush Administration (BA hereafter), with all its years of service to and up-close contacts in the petroleum industry, knew from the outset that it would ignore the obvious need to develop alternative sources of energy and instead seek control of the world's petroleum reserves. This they were willing to achieve through negotiations (e.g., with Libya and other African countries) but they were fully prepared to gain control by military means if necessary, e.g., in Iraq.²

This sub voce agenda had long been advocated by a group of neo-conservatives, many of whom were appointed to top positions in the new administration and quickly came to apply lessons they had learned from political philosopher Leo Strauss. Even as they meshed their imperial aspirations with the petroleum industry's agenda, they spoke publicly not about oil but about a war on terrorism. This duplicity was facilitated by the attacks perpetrated on 11 September 2001. And the media were

largely supportive of the announced rationale, so its captive audiences had little information with which to argue that the invasion/occupation of Iraq did not meet *jus ad bellum* conditions. But with the help of technologies such as the Internet, one could have learned enough about this bellicose strategy to arrive at a geopolitical version of reflective understanding.

BA Spin and US Media Subservience regarding Iraq

Within the context of extensive corporate/military information dominance in the United States, only unaccented hints of US geopolitical motives appeared in 2002-2003 print media reports. Regime change and/or non-proliferation constituted the framework for what was reported. An oil-oriented explanation for invading Iraq, common enough abroad and on the Internet, was ignored or, if reported at all, rejected. Yet pre-invasion connections were made between oil and US activities in many other parts of the world, including Afghanistan. And during the invasion of Iraq the importance of securing its oil fields and protecting the Oil Ministry in Baghdad received some attention. In the occupation phase somewhat more explicit information appeared. Only in business publications were political and diplomatic concerns about Iraqi oil routinely reported.³

Without fanfare, then, the US and its so-called coalition seized Iraq almost exclusively because of its oil. And they would have focused on just this business-orchestrated plan⁴ had it not been for apparently unanticipated obstacles, including concerted guerilla attacks on petroleum infrastructure and on coalition-serving personnel. As a result, oil production in Iraq has barely reached pre-invasion levels; some otherwise interested drillers (e.g., British Petroleum) have postponed indefinitely their plans to develop Iraqi fields; and US military personnel, with advice from oil companies, guard oil-related infrastructure.⁵ Pre-war worst-case scenarios are being realized. These setbacks for the invaders do not negate their initial motives, though, and are already being turned into a rationale for prolonging the occupation.

Thoughtful Non-Geopolitical Explanations of the BA's Rush to Arms

Official pronouncements and their media dispersal tend to preclude rather than assist one's quest for reflective understanding. In particular, as noted above, the American media seldom questioned the reasons the BA gave for invading Iraq. I will do that in the next section via documentary evidence, and will conclude that control of the oil in Iraq was a high priority reason. Before doing so, however, I will first take note of some alternative explanations that are relevant but ultimately obfuscate the geopolitical realities at work in Iraq.

Some arguments put forward to challenge the oil-based explanation for invading Iraq tend to be rather theoretical, others are more pragmatic. The theoretical arguments agree that the real motive was imperialist expansion, but they are poles apart as to the merits of that objective. Some who offer an imperialist explanation support this oil-controlling endeavor, but they see it as just one small part of US superpower responsibilities.⁶ Others disapprove of the Iraqi conquest. They see it as just one aspect of the US's aspiration to dominate the world not only militarily but

politically and economically as well.⁷ Similarly, two different pragmatic assessments discount the oil-based explanation and evaluate the endeavor on the basis of other considerations. One never doubts that occupying Iraq has to do with fighting terrorism, but concludes that the US cannot maintain an unbounded war on terrorism.⁸ The other, put forward by neoconservatives among others, contends that it would be economically naive to try to control the oil market or influence the price of oil by taking over a petroleum source. For, according to this textbook view, access to oil is a function of supply and demand, which neither producers nor distributors can control. So warring for oil would be futile. And in any event, the neoconservatives insisted, the sole reasons for invading Iraq were anti-terrorism and non-proliferation.

This supply-and-demand argument disregards financial and geopolitical reality. Consumers want oil supplied consistently and at a reasonable price. Investors want to know how much oil a provider controls because that affects its ability to influence price. So specialists continually seek more reliable estimates of proven reserves, the quantity and quality of such reserves, and the entities controlling them.⁹ How, then, could a government responsible for an oil-dependent economy not factor world oil prices and availability into its global strategy? Quite simply, it could not. And this is especially the case for the United States, which is the world's largest consumer of petroleum products, much of which comes from the Middle East. So, as one pro-American analyst put it, "(t)he hand on the spigot that regulates production (and therefore price) must be controlled by the United States."¹⁰

This oil-control strategy took form at the beginning of the twentieth century, when nations were busy arming themselves for what became World War I. Military land, sea, and air vehicles were being designed or retrofitted to use the internal combustion engine; and this meant that all serious warlords-to-be had to establish reliable access to oil. The Allied forces did so, the Axis forces did not. When that war ended, the U.S. and the U.K. then competed with one another by aiding coups, invading, or whatever would work to achieve what Norman Livergood calls "full-spectrum, dominance" of the world's oil supply.¹¹ Then Germany and Japan lost World War II, again in large part because neither managed to secure a regular supply of fuel for its weapons systems.¹² The ensuing Cold War changed nothing in this regard except that the Soviet Union became a principal oil-seeker, as have China and India more recently.

In short, non-empirical economists tend to view the oil market as a self-regulating system. But in the real world competing interests have social, political, and economic reasons to stabilize both the price and the supply of oil. This is true a fortiori of any country contemplating international belligerence, as was the United States before, during, and after the invasion of Iraq. To show in particular that this oil-oriented agenda has long been an integral part of American foreign policy I will now cite some policy statements made during pre-BA US administrations, then some BA policy statements.

Pre-BA US Mid-East Geopolitics

During the decades following World War II, the U.K. and increasingly the U.S. resorted to both hard and soft approaches to controlling Mideast oil. Every U.S. administration played its part. Presidents Roosevelt and Truman bolstered oil company interests in Saudi Arabia. In 1956 Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal (crucial for oil

tankers) and President Eisenhower negotiated for shipping rights. Uncooperative Iranian governments were overthrown, until the Ayatollah Khomeini took over; and in 1972 the Iraqi government nationalized that country's extensive oil reserves most of which the U.S. and the U.K. had been exploiting. President Nixon restored military equipment that Israel had lost in a war with Egypt and Syria; OPEC responded with an oil embargo; and U.S. aid to Israel rose from half a million to over three billion dollars a year.¹³

Under President Carter, the US Department of Defense developed a contingency plan that recommended developing a military infrastructure in the Middle East so US forces could respond rapidly to protect oil reserves in the area.¹⁴ Then in his last State of the Union address Carter announced that any "attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region" would be met by "any means necessary, including military force."¹⁵ During the 1980s the Reagan administration applied this so-called Carter Doctrine by helping both sides of the Iran-Iraq war kill off their enemies even as it sought an accord with Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to build an oil pipeline from Kirkuk to Aqaba.¹⁶ But events dictated a different course. In 1991 Hussein invaded Kuwait to recoup his war losses, and new president George H. W. Bush issued a secret memorandum (recently declassified) in which he cited the "longstanding policy" that "(a)ccess to Persian Gulf oil and the security of key friendly states in the area are vital to U.S. national security," then ordered the use of military force to oust the Iraqis from Kuwait.¹⁷ For the rest of the 1990s, including Clinton's eight years in office, the U.S. spent \$50-60 billion a year to "defend" Middle East oil supplies.¹⁸ And together with the U.K. it routinely bombed and insisted on sanctions against Iraq. In this way it severely damaged Iraq's infrastructure, at an unconscionably high cost in human lives. Yet not even this level of belligerence was adequate, some concluded late in the decade, given the rise in both demand for oil and political uncertainties in the Middle East .

Two influential documents that took this stance are recommendations made by Anthony Cordesman to the US Senate Armed Services Committee in 1998 and the US Department of Defense's Strategic Assessment 1999. Cordesman, Co-Director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, advised the Senate committee that the U.S. needed to address the situation in Iraq by means of "unilateral conventional military options" and a "nuclear threat." In doing so, he added, it should safeguard "its own vital strategic interests in terms of declared 'doctrines' rather than relying on UN, Coalition, or Western consensus." The objective, as he saw it, was to "minimize Iraqi influence and control over the regional oil market." And ideally this would require the US to end French and Russian oil companies' involvement in Iraq and establish "the maximum regional role for US industry."¹⁹

A year later, in its fifth annual reflection on security problems, Department of Defense strategists included in their *Strategic Assessment 1999* a chapter on "Energy and Resources." Focusing on the Persian Gulf, this analysis notes the abundant oil reserves there, the area's unreliable political decision-making, and certain "anti-Western attitudes." Given this set of problems, the report declares, "U.S. forces may intervene in future crises and wars in the Persian Gulf. Energy dynamics will dictate that U.S. forces play a major role in Persian Gulf security."²⁰

Such, then, were the strategic precedents and proposals about how the U.S. government should deal with Middle East oil that were available when the BA rose to

power with heavy financial support from US oil industry giants.

The BA's Mideast Geopolitics

BA oil-dominance policy advanced these precedents and proposals in the following way.

Right after his inauguration President Bush established the National Energy Policy Development Group (on January 29, 2001) which studied Iraqi oilfields and issued a report five months later.²¹ US Vice-President Cheney, himself a former oil executive, chaired the meetings of this “group”; and various private-sector individuals, e.g., the then CEO of Enron, regularly attended. A lawsuit seeking the records of the NEPDG was bounced around the courts for two years (spanning the 2004 presidential election) and ultimately dismissed on grounds that the private sector attendees were not members but only aides.²² Meanwhile, a task force set up by Cheney and working under the joint sponsorship of Rice University’s James Baker III Institute and the Council on Foreign Affairs completed a 130-page document entitled *Strategic Energy Policy Challenges for the 21st Century*. Already available in April 2001 but given a September 2001 publication date, it addresses such energy-related topics as conservation, diplomacy, and alternative sources of energy. Especially noteworthy, however, is its reference to military force as a way to stabilize the availability of Iraq’s oil reserves.

To reach this action item the task force first notes that “political factors” (Arab countries’ dismay at the United States’ pro-Israel stance) could “block the development of new oil fields in the Middle East,” and this would have serious ramifications for a country like the U.S. that chooses not to conserve energy. Indeed, it continues, Iraq has already become an on-and-off “swing producer” to manipulate the market, and Saudi Arabia’s “willing(ness) to provide replacement supplies” is unreliable. In order, then, to “eventually ease Iraqi oilfield (investment) restrictions,” suggests the task force, the US should reassess all its policies – “including military” – toward Iraq, because “Iraq reserves represent a major asset that can quickly add capacity to world oil markets and inject a more competitive tenor to oil trade.”²³

This call for self-interested control of Iraqi oil includes a call to arms. The military option is not preeminent in this document, but it is the one the BA chose to implement; and companies with an interest in its succeeding (already well represented on the task force) began to plan accordingly.²⁴ Conveniently, an Independent Working Group cosponsored by the Baker Institute and the Council on Foreign Relations issued a 29-page report in December 2002, setting out “guiding principles for U.S. post-conflict policy in Iraq.” As its title suggests, the report assumes there will be military action. Its “guiding principles” for post-conflict governance in Iraq take up one-third of the document. Two-thirds is about managing production of Iraqi oil and, to a lesser extent, natural gas reserves. But the working group warns against “U.S. statements and behavior” that would indicate an interest in stealing or controlling Iraqi oil and thus provoke “guerilla attacks against U.S. military personnel guarding oil installations.”²⁵

Thus “guided” behind the scenes, the BA in its public rhetoric cited as its *jus ad bellum* reasons for invading Iraq only the presence of WMDs in Iraq and, later, that country’s need for regime change. As soon as Iraq had been occupied, a 1400-member

special forces Iraq Survey Group began searching for weapons of mass destruction, but by October 2003 had found none. The following January 400 of the “surveyors” were reassigned and public talk was increasingly redirected to humanitarian intervention – which has still not achieved any important improvements in the lives of the people. Meanwhile, President Bush signed secret decrees assuring US and UK oil companies unlimited, open-ended control of all Iraqi oil.²⁶ This arrangement was in turn just one part of a plan to privatize all of Iraq’s capital assets in order to establish what one writer called “a neocon utopia.”²⁷ Before foreign investors could be lured to Iraq, however, these privatizations had to be legitimized under international law, and this required authorization by an Iraqi government with internationally recognized sovereignty. To this end, the U.S. set up first an interim council, then a hand-picked group of regional representatives. The latter’s principal task was to arrange a national election, held early in 2005 with only two of the three major ethno-religious groups participating, to name representatives to a constitution-drafting body. This constitution-drafting proceeded against a background of almost daily attacks on coalition-affiliated personnel; and its eventual product left unresolved the ominous behind-the-scenes struggle over who will control Iraq’s assets including especially its oil reserves: nominally some geographically well-placed Iraqis but ultimately only US companies.²⁸ BA spin meanwhile noticed only democracy in action. For, almost as important as controlling the oil is not to appear interested in doing so.

War Motives: Investigative Journalism as Prerequisite to Reflective Understanding

The BA’s reasons and intentions for invading and occupying Iraq were not, as claimed, humanitarian; and they involved self-defense only if controlling oil belongs under this rubric. For, the BA deliberately deceived all but insiders as to its real motives. By uncovering these motives and assessing their moral acceptability one would achieve reflective understanding. This, however, requires not just moral reasoning and/or diplomatic finesse but facts gained via investigative journalism. Practiced already by Thucydides and others, and democratized by the introduction of printing, investigative journalism achieved prominence when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote a series of newspaper articles that debunked British colonialist rhetoric. Emulation of such work in our times is urgently needed to counterbalance philosophically endorsed political deception. For if what people perceive to be the motives for war depends exclusively on military- and corporate-controlled media feeds they will be ill-equipped to question claims as to a *jus ad bellum*. I will consider this problem briefly and suggest why I think a solution is possible.

Many liberal foreign policy experts subscribe to the peace thesis that politically wise statesmen together with an expansion of commerce and trade will build a better world in which no one will go to war for reasons of realpolitik. But political wisdom may not be the driving force behind a government’s decisions. People in power might be motivated by an invidious political philosophy with dangerous implications for the world. Certain BA ideologues in particular seem to have found reasons for international over-reaching in the views of Leo Strauss, according to whom the Nazi takeover of the Weimar Republic showed how easily a democracy can be turned into a demagoguery.

A classicist professionally, Strauss understood Plato’s *Republic* to be a warning

about how democracy would turn Athens into an unlivable, anti-elitist dystopia. To arrive at this atypical interpretation, he claimed to have looked behind the superficial to the esoteric meaning. For, as Plato advised, the truth is for the few; for the masses, a noble lie will do. Strauss transmitted this *modus operandi* to his students some of whom later established the neoconservative Project for the New American Century, some associates of which became key proponents of BA's policy towards Iraq. On their view, evildoers are everywhere, so good—preferably religious—politicians need to use deception in their dealings with friends and enemies alike and, moreover, replace the cautious social science approach that characterized US intelligence gathering with a results-oriented political philosophy. This approach to global affairs being based in part on a political philosophy, it should be challenged philosophically.

Many philosophers are not attracted to such fact-finding research; but just war theorists should endorse it. For, the gap between ideational critique of moral principles and real-world critique of war-making justifications needs to be bridged if just war theory is to be of more than historical interest. This requires redirecting one's epistemological lens from principle-oriented to goal-oriented uses of language, from theoretical generalities to facts on the ground. Just such a move has already been effected in bioethics and environmental philosophy, and it is gaining momentum in social and political philosophy. The pace of change is slow, however, given the gravity of the challenge.

In the 1950s most US philosophers agreed with the logical positivists that philosophical expertise affords no basis for addressing political issues. Then the Vietnam War and its impact on thought control intensified a split between non-concerned and concerned philosophers. The former, e.g., Sidney Hook, reduced a philosopher's position on public affairs to a matter of personal preference. John Rawls in his *The Law of Peoples* asserted that philosophers should leave a government's activities in the world to its foreign policy, political wisdom, and luck. Herbert Marcuse, however, urged philosophers to abandon their "puritan neutralism" and critique "the language, the behavior, the conditions of the existing society" to "counteract the massive ideological indoctrination practiced by the advanced repressive societies of today."²⁹ Some did this, e.g., regarding political violence, the causes of war, and just war theory. Their work was primarily retrospective, though, whereas what is needed is attention to real-time decisions. Is this, however, a problem-free proposal?

Plato, as Leo Strauss advised his proteges, actually thought a society would be better off with philosophers in charge. But the historical record in this regard is mixed at best. The eighteenth-century French "philosophes" were speculative writers who favored bringing progress and then perfection to the human condition. Then power was added to their ideas, and the result was the Reign of Terror. This does not prove that philosophy and power are never compatible; but it is a warning that reflecting on ideas is worse than useless if not conjoined with a moral commitment to human rights.

Similarly, Marx's meticulous analyses of economic exploitation were followed only nominally by Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung. Similar cautions apply to Nietzsche in the hands of the Nazis, although Leo Strauss favored a ruling elite over a classless and stateless society. And such views are, as noted, an inspiration to BA neoconservatives as they pursue their quest for dominance. So having documented the connection between oil and their targeting of Iraq, one seeking a reflective understanding of their

motives should also examine their philosophical underpinnings. For this purpose, I take a lesson from moral philosopher Jonathan Glover's *Humanity* (2001).

In this book Glover discredits the alleged principles used to justify the wars, massacres, and other moral disasters of the twentieth century. Finding no legitimate rationale for these manifestations of human cruelty he concludes that they are based on blind belief, blind adherence to honor, and blind obedience. So he recommends that we seek an explanation for such heartless behavior in human psychology in order, if possible, to ameliorate its consequences in the future.

What, a critic might ask, entitles Glover to report on and analyze the immense body of data on which he relies? As he himself acknowledges, he did not experience first hand the moral disasters he describes but relies on reports by others who did.³⁰ And many of those on whom he depends for information were themselves reporting what they had learned from others. So Glover is twice removed from the empirical evidence. He nonetheless helps us understand this evidence from a moral perspective that the perpetrators assiduously disavowed. He does not justify the moral perspective from which he critiques the political hypocrisy of mass murderers. But he requires the reader to look without euphemism at the ideological slogans and pseudo-science to which they appealed to justify their systematic killing. In so doing, one is backed into a corner from which neither indifference nor approbation offers an acceptable escape.

As Kevin Phillips's *An American Dynasty* (2004) suggests, an analogous moral critique of the BA's agenda to control the world's oil would be both revealing and timely. For, a variation on the antiterrorist/WMD rhetoric BA used to cloud its motives for invading Iraq is now being applied to Iran and North Korea (the other two countries in Bush's "axis of evil"). Why? Because each of these countries harbors significant oil reserves. Iran's is well known. North Korea's, though still mostly undeveloped, have also had the attention of industry experts in recent years.³¹ The geopolitical agenda here in evidence is also a factor in BA's policies towards oil-rich areas in Africa and elsewhere. There is ample reason, then, to extrapolate from the above analysis of the takeover of Iraqi oil to some general observations about how a peace advocate might strive for reflective understanding by questioning the validity of asserted threats on which such military interventions are justified.

With relevant factual information at hand, a peace advocate can avoid being taken in by a government's rhetorical deception and assess independently whether the strategies it intends to implement are morally justifiable. First, the peace advocate might learn from available strategy documents that a government's publicized motives for certain imminent actions do not accurately reflect either the purposes set forth in its strategic plans or the kinds of actions it intends to take in order to carry them out. This discovery would show the need to identify reasons for the discrepancy between propagandized claims and intended actions. If this cannot be done without either ignoring the likely consequences of the intended actions or abandoning relevant moral principles, the peace advocate would have to conclude that the actions in question are not morally justified and that accordingly appropriate means of opposition need to be adopted.

An early example of such an analysis is, as noted, articles by Marx and Engels about the British government's explanations of its actions in pursuit of a colonial empire.³² These articles, which were submitted as letters to the *New York Tribune* over

a period of years, compared the announced and the underlying reasons for and results of military engagements on several continents. They focus on bellicose activity in India and China but also some in Persia, Afghanistan, Burma, and Ireland. Neither writer was a war correspondent in the modern sense but they studied treaties, the records of parliamentary debates, telegraphed dispatches, foreign policy communications published in so-called Blue Books, as well as accounts in government-friendly print media. In this way they undercut the government's duplicity and deception with more fact-based accounts. For example, drawing on published military dispatches Engels lists a number of reasons why government claims that an insurgency in India has been put down are not shared by the British officers, who believe "the guerilla warfare which is sure to succeed the dispersion of the larger bodies of insurgents, will be far more harassing and destructive of life to the British than the present war with its battles and sieges."³³

These articles were published weeks after they were written and an ocean away from their targeted British officials. So they had no immediate effect on public opinion, although over time they helped raise people's consciousness about despicable aspects of colonization. If such work were done now using today's means of instant and global communications, it might even influence policy in the making. By identifying the likely consequences of a given course of action it would invite and lend weight to proposals to do otherwise. In particular, if the reasons a government puts forward for pursuing a course of action do not justify the negative consequences of so acting, e.g., in loss of life and expenditure of taxpayers' money, one could embrace the government's stated reasons only by abandoning the quest for reflective understanding of the issues at hand. Thus the discovery of facts that conflict with government propaganda might well be of moral as well as political import, especially if one can neutralize what Trudy Govier calls an "our side bias."³⁴ For, though hard to achieve in opposition to government-friendly mass media, such an unmasking if widely disseminated would help undermine that government's reliance on unexamined biases which dispel all doubts by laying claim to collective righteousness. As Glover's work makes clear, such unexamined beliefs on a grand scale can impact innocent people's lives in ways that are unspeakably brutal and brutalizing. Whence the importance of putting just war theory on an emergency basis and examining *ante bellum* the unexamined beliefs of active warmongers.

Philosophers, as noted, have in recent years been moving in this direction. They have not yet generated a real-time critique of reasons put forward for going to war. But they are examining background concepts that have been formulated to propagandize military endeavors yet to come. Many authors have, for example, moved beyond "war on terrorism" rhetoric to focus on the morality of terrorism as such.³⁵ Some wisely warn that merely saying "they are terrorists" does not justify taking military action against people so labeled and still less others only incidentally associated with them.³⁶ What matters, though, is that philosophers are beginning to critique political violence expeditiously. Undue haste is, to be sure, an enemy of thoroughness and accuracy. But, such risks aside, might we not help put warmongers on the defensive by debunking military propaganda?

Anyone knowledgeable about our corporate-controlled media would, of course, detect in this question a naivete about the difficulties involved. In particular, the

propaganda model put forward by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky,³⁷ though intended as a call to action, actually supports the proposition that so long as capitalism reigns supreme corporate control of the media will thrive. For, on their view, capitalist interests systematically filter what gets reported and with what bias, and they are able to do this because they control outlets via ownership and funding (advertising), and they both favor and produce content which conforms to a preferred ideological orientation (anti-communism now giving way to anti-terrorism). But Herman and Chomsky do not consider this control entirely effective nor do they entirely rule out the possibility of a counter-force made possible via new communications technologies.³⁸

Many more steps must be taken, then, to bring an anti-war agenda to fruition. These range from discovering to disseminating information detrimental to warmongers' aspirations. At the discovery end one can learn much from British political theorist John Keane, who masterfully tests political violence against the principles of democracy. And at the dissemination end the Internet and especially the World Wide Web have clearly become the medium of choice, both because of the burgeoning number of blogs that convey full spectrum political opinion and because of dedicated web site and e-mail services that operate on a daily basis to deliver information and commentary from around the world to concerned citizens everywhere.

The importance of cyberspace as a vehicle for advancing direct democracy can hardly be overstated. For it offers people anywhere in the world a way to counteract imperialist propaganda by submitting their local suffering to the dialog of a virtual community that can be moved to action. This has been a result of every major innovation in communications technology—e.g., printing made the Reformation and eighteenth century revolutions possible; the fax machine gave the 1990 Chinese dissidents a global voice. What sets computer-based communications apart is the rapidity with which information can be delivered, so much so that it may in time emerge as a technological basis for *ante bellum* dissent.

By correcting political and military disinformation skilled users of this technology are becoming a cybernetic replacement of the print era broadside. To be found in many languages, these online information gleaners include such English-language services as The Guardian (London), the Pacifica Foundation's Democracy Now, the Global Policy Forum (which focuses on UN and global decision making), the Nation Institute's Tom Dispatch, Human Rights Watch, the Information Clearing House News, and U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW). Specialized organizations challenge everything from torture (Amnesty International) to political mischief (the Center for Public Integrity) to intolerably reactionary candidates for public office (MoveOn.org). The ability of these services and organizations to deliver otherwise suppressed information to computers everywhere is encouraging; and they may yet become even more influential. But they will continue to be effective only if they can surmount several inherent challenges.

One challenge that a user of cybernetic communication faces is how to determine what disseminated information is true. This problem is symbolized by Shakespearean characters as diverse as Iago and Richard III; and it is as ancient as the origins of political discourse. For, the ancient Greeks and Romans struggled with it, especially in response to monarchical rule, and some offered useful criteria for recognizing true statements. For example, a position taken regarding political matters

is more likely to be true, they noted, if the person who takes the position is put at risk by doing so. Also, a stated position is more likely to be true if those who take it behave in accordance with what that position implies.³⁹ Such suggestions go to intentions only, so provide no foolproof screening device. This caveat noted, they are applicable to electronic communications, where they take the form of watchdog and alternative web sites. Some of these have their own bias; all are selective. And many of them examine and help disseminate one another's research. This collaborative interdependence arguably heightens each service's accuracy and transparency, as does the input from such critical web sites as Antiwar.com, Center for Media and Democracy, Common Dreams, CounterPunch, Truth in Media, and Z-Net. These various electronic resources do not yield incontrovertible truth, but as is the case with any persistent investigative journalism they do help establish a reasonable basis for believing and acting on the information conveyed.

A second challenge to cybernetic communication is how to keep it fully accessible in the face of a concerted effort to subject it to institutional control. For, both governments and media conglomerates are striving to impose constraints on what users can do electronically. To this end the former want to undermine privacy protections by appeals to such generalities as decency and national defense. The dominant media businesses are trying to maximize copyright privileges by means of proprietary source code and digital-rights-management technology.⁴⁰ If the latter in particular are able to implement their plan, the fair use doctrine will vanish and along with it state-of-the-art free speech. The web browser's rapid access to information on any subject, only recently become feasible, may be undermined by corporate priorities; and, to the delight of governments, bloggers may no longer be able to disseminate politically embarrassing information. Such institutional over-reaching must be averted, then, if any power is to be available to the people electronically.

Political violence, in short, can be challenged and maybe even avoided by an ever more collective achievement of reflective understanding. To be effective in real time, though, the occasional concerned scholar or politician must become thousands, indeed millions of people who refuse to be duped by propaganda promoting deeds that only an amoral capitalist could endorse. Unarmed opponents of militarism are, of course, at an extreme disadvantage; but thanks in part to information technologies US troops have left Vietnam, China has changed since Tiananmen Square, and the Ukraine has a less authoritarian government. So when a critical mass of voices rises in opposition to unjustified violence, the morally blind can no longer rely on the politically deaf for support. In such circumstances, peace becomes a live option.

Notes

1. E. Said, "Window on the World," *Guardian Unlimited*, 2 Aug. 2003; "Edward Said," *The Economist* (4 October 2003), 84.

2. See P. Roberts, *The End of Oil* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

3. See, e.g., *Wall Street Journal* 3 April 2003, A6; 7 April 2003, A7; 14 April 2003, A8; 15 April 2003, A8; 18 April 2003, A3; 13 May 2003, A17; 2 April 2003, A14; 11 April 2003, A1+; 17 April 2003, A4; 12 May 2003, A16; 11 Aug. 2003, A1+; 30 Sept. 2003, A18.

4. To facilitate US companies' control of Iraqi oil President Bush's Executive Order 13303 exempts them from liability for any production- or distribution-related happening.
5. See *Wall Street Journal*, 27 March 2002, A8, and 30 June 2003, A1+, and in *NY Times*, 6 July 2004, A1+.
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