

# A Stake, Not a Mistake

## On Not Seeing the Enemy

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I spent several years in the early sixties studying Underdevelopment. It was frustrating, in that none of the theories I examined really seemed to explain the phenomenon. That is, the Theories of Development that were prevalent then (only in mainstream discourse, I later learned) didn't really answer the question: Why are some countries poor? I would look at US Aid programs, only to conclude that they didn't work, that they didn't help countries develop, and often got in the way. My response at that time was to argue, and to try to call to the attention of US Aid administrators, that the programs weren't working, and were not achieving the results they were supposed to. The programs were not facilitating development and economic growth in the countries they were supposed to be benefiting. Fortunately for me, with the explosion and re-emergence of radical consciousness in late sixties, I was able to overcome this naiveté.

Unfortunately though, for much of the American Left (especially for its so-called progressive wing), this naiveté, this bad habit of not seeing the enemy, this tendency to think that the US government's policies and actions are just mistakes, this seemingly ineradicable belief that the US government means well, is the most common outlook. It was certainly the majoritarian belief among those who opposed the Vietnam War. I helped write a broad sheet once, which we distributed at a big anti-war demonstration in Washington DC in November 1969, and which was titled "Vietnam is a Stake not a Mistake". In this document we spelled out the imperial reasons which explained why the government was waging war, quite deliberately and rationally, against Vietnam.

In subsequent decades there has been no end to the commentators who take the 'this is a mistake' line. Throughout the low intensity (i.e., terrorist) wars against Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1980s we heard this complaint again and again. It is currently seen in the constant stream of commentaries on the US assault on Colombia. It has been heard repeatedly during the past two years in the demonstrations against the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. Protesters complain that the WTO's policies of structural adjustment are having the opposite effect of what they're supposed to. That is, they are hindering, not facilitating, development, and causing poverty, not alleviating it.

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<sup>1</sup>An excellent book on Yugoslavia which does not suffer from this naiveté, the best book so far, that I am aware of, on the bombing, is Michael Parenti, *To Kill a Nation: The Attack on Yugoslavia* (Verso, 2000, 246 pages).

Two years ago, in 1999, throughout the 78 day bombing attack on Yugoslavia, much of the outpouring of progressive commentary on the event (that which didn't actually endorse the bombing that is) argued that "this is a mistake".<sup>1</sup> My favorite quote from that episode, was from Robert Hayden, Director of the Center for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, being interviewed by Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now*, April 19, 1999. He said: "But we have the Clinton administration that developed a diplomacy that seems to have been intended to have produced this war, and now the Clinton administration's actions seem determined to produce a wider war." Amy Goodman: "Why would the Clinton Administration want to produce a war?" Hayden: "Boy, you know what? You've got me there. And as I say, you have to go back to the simple principles of incompetence. Never assume competence on the part of these guys." This was surely the bottom of the pit for the 'this is a mistake' crowd. I could cite quotes like this by the dozen, but instead let me turn to our current "war".

So what has been the response of the 'progressive community' to the bombing of Afghanistan? As usual, they just don't get it. They just can't seem to grasp the simple fact that the government does this stuff on purpose. Endlessly, progressives talk as if the government is just making a mistake, does not see the real consequences of its actions, or is acting irrationally, and they hope to correct the government's course by pointing out the errors of its ways. Progressives assume that their goals – peace, justice, well-being – are also the government's goals. So when they look at what the government is doing, they get alarmed and puzzled, because it is obvious that the government's actions are not achieving these goals. So they cry out: "Hey, this policy doesn't lead to peace!" or "Hey, this policy doesn't achieve justice (or democracy, or development)!" By pointing this out, they hope to educate the government, to help it to see its mistakes, to convince it that its policies are not having the desired results.<sup>2</sup>

How can they not see that the US government acts deliberately, and that it knows what it is doing? How can they not see that the government's goals are not peace and justice, but empire and profit. It *wants* these wars, this repression. These policies are not mistakes; they are not irrational; they are not based on a failure of moral insight (since morality is not even a factor in their considerations); they are not aberrations; they are not based on a failure to analyze the situation correctly; they are not based on ignorance. This repression, these bombings, wars, massacres, assassinations, and covert actions are the coldly calculated, rational, consistent, intelligent, and informed actions of a ruling class determined at all costs to keep its power and wealth and preserve its way of life (capitalism). It has demonstrated great historical presence, persistence, and continuity in pursuing this objective. This ruling class *knows* that it is committing atrocities, *knows* that it is destroying democracy, hope, welfare, peace, and justice, *knows* that it is murdering, massacring, slaughtering, poisoning, torturing, lying, stealing, and *it doesn't care*. Yet most progressives seem to believe that if only they point out often enough and loud enough that the ruling class is murdering people, that it will wake up, take notice, apologize, and stop doing it.

Here is a typical expression of this naiveté (written by an author, Brian Willson, who was in the process of introducing a list of US interventions abroad!):

"Many of us are continually disturbed and grief stricken because it seems that our U.S. government does not yet understand: (a) the historical social, cultural, and economic issues that

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<sup>2</sup>Web sites such as *Common Dreams* ([www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)), *Znet* ([www.zmag.org/znet](http://www.zmag.org/znet)), and *Alternet* ([www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org)) are loaded with "this is a mistake" pieces, as are magazines like the *Nation*, the *Progressive*, *In These Times*, and the *Progressive Populist*.

underlay most of the political and ecological problems of the world; (b) the need to comply with, as legally agreed to, rather than continually defy, international law and international institutions established for addressing conflict; and (c) that military solutions, including production, sale, and use of the latest in technological weapons, are simply ill-equipped and wrong-headed for solving fundamental social and economic problems.”<sup>3</sup>

He is wrong on all three counts. (a) The US government has an intimate, detailed knowledge of the social, cultural, and economic characteristics of every country it intervenes in. It is especially familiar with the ethnic, linguistic, political, and religious divisions within the country. It is not interested in how these issues “underlay most of the political and ecological problems of the world”, since it is not interested in those problems, certainly not in solving them, since it is the main creator of those problems. Rather, it uses its expert knowledge to manipulate events within the country in order to advance its own goals, profit and empire. (b) The US government understands perfectly that it expressly needs not to comply with international law in order to maintain its ability to act unilaterally, unfettered by any constraints, to advance its imperial aims. The claim that the US defies international law because of a misunderstanding is absurd. (c) Who says that the US government is trying to solve “fundamental social and economic problems”? These are not its aims at all. The objectives that it does pursue, consciously and relentlessly, namely profit and empire, are in fact the *causes* of these very “social and economic problems”. Furthermore, for its true aims, military solutions, far from being “ill-equipped and wrong-headed”, work exceptionally well. Military might sustains the empire. Arming every little client regime of the international ruling class with “the latest in technological weapons” is necessary, and quite effective, in maintaining the repressive apparatus needed to defend empire, in addition to raking in lots of profit for the arms manufacturers. But evidently Mr. Willson “does not yet understand” any of these things.

Let’s take another example. Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman, otherwise very sensible writers, complain that “bombing a desperately poor country under the yoke of a repressive regime is a wrongheaded response [to the “unspeakable acts of violence” committed on Sept. 11]. “The U.S. bombing of Afghanistan should cease immediately,” they say. They discuss three reasons: “1. The policy of bombing increases the risk of further terrorism against the United States. 2. The bombing is intensifying a humanitarian nightmare in Afghanistan. 3. There are better ways to seek justice.” All three statements are true of course, but irrelevant, because seeking justice, avoiding humanitarian nightmares, and reducing the risk of terrorism do not enter into the calculations of US policy makers. Quite the contrary, US policy makers *create* injustice, humanitarian nightmares, and terrorism, throughout the world, in pursuit of the imperial objective of making profit, and this has been thoroughly documented in thousands of scholarly studies. So for Mokhiber and Weissman to talk in this way, and phrase the problem in this way, exposes their failure to really comprehend the enemy we face, which in turn prevents them from looking for effective strategies to defeat that enemy, like so many other opponents of the “war”. Hence all the moralizing, the bulk of which is definitely directed at the rulers, not at the ruled. That is, it is not an attempt to win over the ruled, but an attempt to win over the rulers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>S. Brian Willson, “Who are the Real Terrorists? Why some veterans oppose counter- “terrorist” exercises”, March 1999, Veterans for Peace, at: ([www.mbay.net/~jenvic/vfp/mar22.htm](http://www.mbay.net/~jenvic/vfp/mar22.htm)).

<sup>4</sup>Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman, “Three Arguments Against the War,” posted on the *Common Dreams News Center* web site for October 18, 2001 ([www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)).

It's what I call the "we should" crowd – all those people who hope to have a voice in the formation of policy, people whose stances are basically that of consultants to the ruling class. "We" should do this, "we" shouldn't do that, as if they had anything at all to say about what our rulers do. This is the normal stance among the bootlicking intelligentsia of course. But what is it doing among progressives and radicals? Even if their stance is seen to be not exactly that of consultants, but that of citizens making demands upon their government, what makes them think that the government ever listens? I think this attitude – the "we should" attitude – is rooted in part at least in the fact that most progressives still believe in nations and governments. They believe that this is "our" country, and that this is "our" government, or at least should be. So Kevin Danaher says that "we should get control of the government." They identify themselves as Americans, or Germans, or Mexicans, or Swedes. So they are constantly advising and making demands that 'their' government should do this and that. If they would reject nationalism altogether, and states and governments, they could begin to see another way.

A variation of the 'this is a mistake' theme has appeared in commentaries on the present "war", on Afghanistan. Progressives argue that the US is "falling into a trap". They argue that Osama bin Laden had hoped to provoke the US into doing just what it is doing, attacking Afghanistan. In their view, the US government is being stupid, acting blindly, responding irrationally, and showing incompetence. That is, it is "making a mistake". It never seems to occur to these analysts that the government may actually be awake, even alert, or that it jumped at the opportunity offered it by the attacks of September Eleven to do what it had wanted to do anyway – seize Afghanistan, build a big new base in Uzbekistan, declare unending war on the enemies of Empire everywhere, and initiate draconian repression against internal dissent in order to achieve "domestic tranquility".

I saw yet another variation on the theme just recently. John Tirman writes about "Unintended Consequences".<sup>5</sup> He thinks that "No matter how cautious generals and political leaders are ... unseen and unintended [results] occur, at times as a bitter riptide which overwhelms the original rationales for engaging in armed combat. This unpredictable cycle of action and reaction has thwarted U.S. policy in southwest Asia for 50 years." It's the usual mistake: Tirman imputes policies to the US government which it does not have. US policy has not been thwarted, it has been highly successful. The US has succeeded in keeping control of Middle Eastern oil for the past half century. This is what it wanted to do, and this is what it did. Tirman however reviews the history of US intervention in the Middle East, beginning with the overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, and sees it as one long blunder, nothing but bumbling incompetence, complicated further by 'unintended consequences' which thwart the goals of American foreign policy. He seems to think that the US was (or "should be") trying to reduce US dependence on Middle Eastern oil, fighting Islamic fundamentalism, reducing human suffering, assisting in economic development, promoting democracy, and so on – anything and everything except what it is actually doing, keeping control of Middle Eastern oil, and using any means necessary to do so. Tirman is aware of course that this (oil) is the true aim of US policy, because he quotes directly from US officials who state this objective explicitly, but somehow this doesn't sink in. Instead, he finally asks in exasperation: "What will be next in this series of haunting mistakes?"

Ariel Dorfman, author of a creative critique of US imperialism, in the form of *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, was being interviewed on *Democracy Now*

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<sup>5</sup>John Tirman, "Unintended Consequences", posted on *Alternet*, Oct 24, 2001 (at [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org)).

by Amy Goodman, on October 25, 2001, about the assassination of Digna Ochoa, the leading civil rights lawyer in Mexico. When asked by Goodman to put the murder in the larger context of what was happening in the world, like in Afghanistan, Dorfman replied: "Because the US is in Afghanistan and it needs all its allies behind it, they are going to turn a blind eye to all the abuses of authority that are happening." Pardon me? A blind eye? Isn't the US government in the business, with both eyes open, of murdering labor leaders, leftists, progressives, and civil rights activists all over the world? Dorfman went on to say that now would be "a good moment that President Bush could call his friend Vicente Fox and say: 'I want the murderers of Digna Ochoa put on trial.'" Excuse me! Is he kidding? It's quite probable that Bush did call Fox, but with a rather different message, namely, to tell him that while the world's attention was focused on Afghanistan, now would be a good time to kill Digna Ochoa y Placido.

An Afghani man from Kabul escaped into Pakistan carrying a packet of letters addressed to the world's leaders, "handwritten messages from his panic-stricken community."

"The world must know what is happening in Afghanistan," said Mohammed Sardar, 46, his voice ragged with anxiety and anger. "The terrorists and the leaders are still free, but the people are dying and there is no one to listen to us. I must get to President Bush and the others and tell them they are making a terrible mistake."<sup>6</sup>

The widespread belief that the US government has good intentions, a belief held onto tenaciously in spite of decades of overwhelming empirical evidence refuting it, has got to be one of the greatest phenomena of mass delusion in history. It would take a twenty-first century Freud to unravel this one. Here is a government that has already bombed two other countries to smithereens just in the past ten years, first Iraq and then Yugoslavia (not to mention endless interventions abroad since its inception<sup>7</sup>). Now it is bombing Afghanistan to smithereens – hospitals, fuel supplies, food depots, electrical systems, water systems, radio stations, telephone exchanges, remote villages, mosques, old folks homes, UN offices, Red Cross warehouses, clinics, schools, neighborhoods, roads, dams, airports – and a victim of the assault escapes to plead for help from the very people who are attacking him. To have created such an illusion as this is surely one of the greatest feats of propaganda ever seen.<sup>8</sup>

So although it is important to try to shatter this illusion, it is ultimately not enough, and of very limited effectiveness, simply to list all the atrocities committed by our rulers, carefully

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<sup>6</sup>Reported by Pamela Constable, *Washington Post*, Oct 24, 2001, "Plaintive Afghan's Plea from Community: Stop the Bombing".

<sup>7</sup>The best brief introduction to this history that I have seen so far is "A Concise History of United States Global Interventions, 1945 to Present," by William Blum, in his *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* (Common Courage, 2000, 308 pages), pp. 125-162. References to longer lists of interventions covering the whole history of the U.S. government can be found in Zoltan Grossman's "One Hundred Years of Intervention," on *Jay's Leftist and Progressive Internet Resource Directory* ([www.neravt.com/left/invoke.htm](http://www.neravt.com/left/invoke.htm)). See also, Steve Kangas, "A Timeline of CIA Atrocities," available on the *Liberalism Resurgent* web site at (<http://home.att.net/~Resurgence/CIAtimeline.html>).

<sup>8</sup>The only other essay from this deluge of writing about the so-called war on terrorism that I have seen which challenges the 'this is a mistake' line (although many people have pointed out that the US government is itself a terrorist state), is a really excellent piece by Edward Herman and David Peterson, "Who Terrorizes Whom?," posted on *Zmag* web site, dated October 18, 2001 ([www.zmag.org/whoterrorizes.htm](http://www.zmag.org/whoterrorizes.htm)). In discussing Richard Falk's claim that the attack on Afghanistan is "the first truly just war since World War II", for example, they write: "it never occurs to Falk that the right-wing Republican regime of Bush and Cheney, so close to the oil industry and military-industrial complex, might have an agenda incompatible with a just war." They call this Left Accommodationism, cite several examples, and give a good analysis of the phenomenon.

expose all their double standards, accuse them of being the real terrorists, morally condemn what they are doing, or call for peace. All these arguments are useful of course in the battle for the hearts and minds of average people, *if average people ever heard them*, which they do not, for the most part. And if they do hear them, it's like they (most of them) are tuning in to madness, they're so brainwashed. It takes a lot more than mere arguments to break through the mindset of a thoroughly indoctrinated people.

Of all the dozens of comments that I read on the government's response to the attacks of September Eleven, precious few raised the key question: How do we stop them (the government, from attacking Afghanistan)? For the most part, progressive commentators don't even raise questions of strategy.<sup>9</sup> They are too busy analyzing ruling class ideology, in order to highlight its hypocrisies. Proving that the ruling class is hypocritical doesn't get us very far. It's useful of course. Doing this work is an important task. Noam Chomsky, for example, devotes himself almost exclusively to this task, and we should be thankful that we have his research. He usually does mention also, somewhere in almost every speech, article, or interview, that 'it doesn't have to be this way', that this situation we are in is not inevitable, and that we can change it. But when asked "How?", he replies, "Organize, agitate, educate." Well, sure. But the Christian Coalition organizes, agitates, and educates. So did the Nazis and the Klu Klux Klan. The Taliban organizes, agitates, and educates. So does the ruling class, and it does so in a massive and highly successful way, which results in overwhelming hegemony for its point of view.

In spite of more than three decades of blistering exposés of US foreign policy, and in spite of the fact that he is an anarchist, and is thus supposedly against all government, at least in the long run, Chomsky still regularly uses the 'universal we'. Much of the time Chomsky says "The US government does this, or does that," but some of the time he says "We do this, or we do that," thus including himself, and us, as agents in the formation and execution of US foreign policy. This is an instance of what I call the 'universal we'. It presumes a democracy that does not exist. The average American has no say whatsoever in the formation and execution of US foreign policy. Nor do we even have any influence in picking the people who are making it, since we have no say over who gets to run for office or what they do after they are elected. So to say something like "we shouldn't be bombing Afghanistan", as so many progressives do, is highly misleading, and expresses a misperception and misdiagnosis of the situation we are in.

In the question period following Chomsky's major address on "The New War Against Terror" (delivered at MIT on October 18)<sup>10</sup>, Chomsky was challenged by a man in the audience who accused Chomsky of blaming America for the tragedy of September 11. Chomsky correctly said that the term America is an abstraction and cannot do anything. But then he said that he blamed himself, and his questioner, and others present, for this event (implying that 'we' are responsible for what 'our' government does). This is a half-truth at best. The blame for September Eleven rests squarely on those who did it. Next, to the extent that a connection can be proved between their actions and US foreign policy, the US government is to blame, and the ruling class that controls the government. Average Americans are to blame for what the US government does only in the

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<sup>9</sup>A rare exception is Naomi Klein, who frequently focuses on questions of strategy. See for example, "Signs of the Times," the *Nation*, October 22, 2001.

<sup>10</sup>The transcript of this speech has been posted on *Znet*. The speech was broadcast on *Democracy Now* ([www.webactive.com/pacifica/exile](http://www.webactive.com/pacifica/exile)) on October 23 and 24, 2001. A tape recording of the speech is also available for purchase from *Alternative Radio* ([www.alternativeradio.org](http://www.alternativeradio.org)). Streaming audio is also available on ([www.zmag.org/znet/GlobalWatch/chomskymit.htm](http://www.zmag.org/znet/GlobalWatch/chomskymit.htm)).

sense that they have not managed to change or block its policies, either because they haven't tried or because they have tried but have failed.

Of course, the category of Average American is an abstraction as well. Many average Americans vigorously support US foreign policy. Others oppose it, but have failed to change it. Those of us who want a real democracy, and want to put an end to Empire, have so far failed to do so, and only in this sense are we in anyway responsible for September Eleven. But even this failure must be judged in light of the relative strengths that the parties bring to the fight. We cannot fault ourselves for being defeated by an opponent with overwhelmingly superior forces, as long as we fought as bravely and as hard as we could. Our task is to find ways to enhance our strengths and weaken theirs. To fail to make a distinction between the ruling class and the rest of us hinders this task, causes us to presume a democracy that does not exist, to misunderstand exactly what we are up against, and to misidentify the enemy. It thus prevents us from devising a successful strategy for defeating this enemy.

In this same speech, which was over an hour long, Chomsky didn't once mention oil. When questioned about this during the discussion that followed, he said that of course oil was always there in the background, for anything happening in the Middle East, but he didn't see oil as an immediate factor in the current crisis. He is surely wrong about this. There is plenty of evidence that securing Afghanistan, in order to get a pipeline through to the Arabian Sea, is a key consideration for US policy makers. They are already in the process of building a huge new military base in Uzbekistan (just as they are building one in Kosovo), and have concluded a long-term agreement with the Uzbekistan government to do so, similar to ones they have made in Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, Philippines, and elsewhere. These bases will be used to secure the Central Asian oil and gas reserves for the West. They will also be thrown into service to accomplish another aim, beyond oil, namely, to facilitate the recolonization of the Balkans and Russia, and to ensure that they do not return to Communism or try to escape the New World Order. This is the larger geopolitical objective that drives the Empire builders.

Howard Zinn seems to think it is all a struggle between an 'old way of thinking', based on war and violence, and a 'new way of thinking' based on peace and nonviolence. Hardly a hint here of Empire, and no hint at all of Profit and Capital. As moving and inspiring as his remarks were on the September Eleven crisis,<sup>11</sup> they just didn't cut it, as concerns getting ourselves out of the horrible situation we are in. Zinn of course is very aware (but most so-called progressives aren't) of ruling classes, empire, capital, and profit, and has labored long and hard to write their histories and people's opposition to them. But somehow this doesn't get reflected in his thinking about what to do about it all now. When it comes to strategy, moral condemnation is where he rested his case, in his response to these events at least.

In a speech on October 21, in Burlington, Vermont, Zinn said that we must change from being a military superpower to being a moral superpower.<sup>12</sup> During the speech he had vividly described the many foreign invasions undertaken by the US government and their devastating

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<sup>11</sup>Howard Zinn's initial remarks on the September Eleven tragedy were aired on *Democracy Now* on September 13, 2001 in an interview with Amy Goodman ([www.webactive/pacifica/exile](http://www.webactive/pacifica/exile)). Zinn made similar remarks in an interview with Noelle Hanrahan on *Flashpoints Radio* on September 13, 2001 ([www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net)). A short essay along the same lines was published in *The Progressive*, for November, 2001, "The Old Way of Thinking", pp. 8-9.

<sup>12</sup>Howard Zinn's speech in Burlington, Vermont on October 21, 2001 was broadcast on *Democracy Now* on Oct 22, 2001 ([www.webactive/pacifica/exile](http://www.webactive/pacifica/exile)). A tape recording of the speech is also available for purchase from *Alternative Radio* ([www.alternativeradio.org](http://www.alternativeradio.org))

consequences, claimed that America was not a peaceful nation, reminded us that governments lie, pointed out that oil is the key to American foreign policy in the Middle East, and described the vast deployment of military bases and armament all over the world in order to extend American power. He may even have mentioned profit once or twice. But he never once mentioned 'capitalism' (let alone "colonialism", "imperialism", or "ruling class"), nor did he in any way indicate an awareness that the projection of American power all over the world is for a reason, that it is being used in defense of a particular social order, and that this social order benefits, and is therefore being defended by, a particular class.

It's almost as if Zinn thinks that the US government could simply pack up and go home, if it only wanted to – dismantle its bases, pull its armies, fleets, and planes out, and leave the world alone. If the US ruling class did that, it, and the system upon which it feeds, capitalism, would collapse. So we know that it is not going to dismantle its forward bases and leave the world alone, no matter how hard we try to shame it with our moralizing. Zinn did not seem to grasp this fact or to recognize that there is an enemy that has to be defeated, before the \$350 billion could be taken away from the Pentagon and used to help people (another one of his recommendations). And when it came time to talk about what to do about it all, he recommended organizing demonstrations and writing letters to our congressional representatives!

The 'peace now' protesters strike a similar stance. Of course, it was heartening to see an anti-war movement blossom almost immediately. But it was also disheartening. It meant that radicals were letting the war-mongers set the agenda. Instead of continuing the fight against neoliberalism and its institutions, and against capitalism, oppositionists suddenly dropped all this to launch an anti-war campaign. The candlelight vigils, especially, seemed to me a pathetic response to a war-mongering, repressive government. This happens again and again. The government launches a war of aggression, and the peaceniks take to the streets, with their candles, crying "peace now" and "no more war". Do they ever win? Have they ever stopped even one war? Do they ever even think about how they could win? Doesn't the inefficacy of their response prove that they are not really serious about peace? Do they ever think about ways of actually stopping the murderers rather than just pleading with them not to kill? They keep saying that peace cannot be achieved by going to war. Who says the US government wants peace!? They quote A.J. Muste as saying that war is not the way to peace; peace is the way. Is this relevant? Does it make sense to quote such thoughts to a government that has always engaged, from its inception two hundred years ago, in systematic mass murder?

Similarly with the bulk of the other progressive commentators. They are just trying to change the government's policy, not stop them and deprive them of power. Here is a typical sentence. Rahul Mahajan and Robert Jensen write: "The next step is for us to build a movement that can change our government's barbaric and self-destructive policy."<sup>13</sup> You see, from the government's point of view, its policy is not barbaric or self-destructive. It is intelligent, self-serving, and self-preserving. Mahajan and Jensen actually pretty much admit this in their piece, by reasoning that "This war is about the extension of U.S. power. It has little to do with bringing the terrorists to justice, or with vengeance." (Such a view is rather rare among progressives actually.) They argue that there are three other motives for the war, from the government's point of view: the desire to defend "imperial credibility", to control "oil and natural gas of Central Asia," and "to push a right-

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<sup>13</sup>Rahul Mahajan and Robert Jensen, "A War of Lies", posted on the *Common Dreams News Center* web site for October 8, 2001 ([www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)).



wing domestic agenda.” Nevertheless, in spite of these insights, they still stop short of realizing that they therefore have to fight, stop, and neutralize the government, rather than just change its policy. Given who the government is, who it serves (capital, the rich), and what its interests and priorities are, it can’t change its policies into those favored by progressives, not and survive as an imperial power that is.

It is not only as regards foreign policy that the ‘this is a mistake’ line makes an appearance. Progressive commentators suffer from this affliction with regards to domestic policy too. If the government passes a tax cut to benefit the richest corporations and superrich individuals, but calls it a package to stimulate the economy, progressives complain loudly that the bill doesn’t accomplish what it’s supposed to, that it doesn’t stimulate the economy. Why can’t they simply admit that the government (the Administration *and* Congress) *intended* and *wanted* to give more money to the rich ruling class, because it is from, and represents the interests of, this class, and that it called its bill an economic stimulus package only in order to sell it and to deceive the American public?

The ‘this is a mistake’ crowd was out in full force in the discussion surrounding the new anti-terrorist legislation which the Bush Administration submitted to Congress immediately after the September Eleven attacks. Attorney General Ashcroft said that the government had taken pains not to abridge any of our precious civil rights in its efforts to deal with the terrorist threat, and had tried to strike a balance between security and liberty. So progressives took him at his word and started pointing out that this wasn’t true, that the bill did step on our civil rights and did not strike a good balance between security and liberty. Then they started coming up with a bunch of excuses. They said the bill was ‘rammed through Congress’. Well, why did Congress permit this? They said the leaders of Congress bypassed the usual rules and procedures, and dealt with the bill basically in secret? Well, if Congress is committed to democracy, why can’t it practice democracy in its own halls? And why weren’t there attempts to stop this secret handling of the bill? They said that Congress didn’t even have a chance to read the bill. Well, why didn’t it take the time to do so, and delay the vote until it had?

This bill, the so-called USA Patriot Act of 2001, which shreds the fourth amendment (protection against unwarranted search and seizure), gives the government the right to spy on everyone, bypasses criminal law, the courts, and due process in numerous instances, plus dozens more horrors, was passed in the Senate by a vote of 98-1. So this flaming liberal senator, Edward Kennedy, didn’t realize what he was voting for? Please. He knew. They knew. *And they wanted it.* The Administration and Congress (minus 66 representatives in the House and 1 senator in the Senate) were united in their desire to further strengthen the Police State that they have been building for some time. They are not committed to democracy. They are committed to preserving capitalism, which is their lifeblood. You think they haven’t noticed the growing protest movement that has erupted onto the world scene in the last two years? You think they’re not worried about that movement and determined to stop it?

A friendly, tolerant, enlightened, pseudo-democratic capitalism is no longer historically feasible (not that it was ever really much of any of these things). We are living in the age of Zero Tolerance Capitalism, with its Global War Machine, its Mammoth Intelligence Agencies, its Secret Police, its Echelons and Carnivores, its Covert Operations, its humungous Police Departments, its ubiquitous Security Guards, its Death Squads, its National Security States, its Swat Teams and Special Forces, its State Terrorism and Torture, its High-Tech Surveillance, its Non-Lethal Weapons, its Low-Intensity Warfare, its Para-Militaries, its Mercenaries, its Smart Bombs, its

Prison-Industrial Complex, its Chemical, Biological, and Nuclear weapons, and its World Bank and World Trade Organization. Now, with the US Congress's aptly-named USA Patriot Act of 2001, it has finally managed to shred the Bill of Rights. The US ruling class never wanted the Bill of Rights to begin with; it was forced on them.

So the Hitlers and Mussolinis of the world have won after all (almost). All the while we were thinking that we had rid the world of fascism in the Second World War, fascism was sneaking in the back door, and turning America into a World Fascist Empire. Zero Tolerance fascist-like regimes, supported and often installed by the United States, have long existed throughout most of the world – Mobuto in Zaire, Pinochet in Chile, Somoza in Nicaragua, Armas in Guatemala, Franco in Spain, Papadopoulos in Greece, Pahlavi in Iran, Marcos in the Philippines, Sharon in Israel. Now the repressive, Zero Tolerance, National Security State, has come home to America. They will probably start torturing and killing in Europe and America the way they have been doing everywhere else. (They are already torturing and killing, but they have managed so far to keep it under wraps). Will they get away with it?

How many centuries of mass murder does it take to prove that ruling classes dependent on and devoted to a system based on profit are impervious to moral appeal, and are beyond redemption, certainly as long as they have any power left to continue killing? Moral appeals are useless against such people. Were moral appeals enough to defeat the Nazis, and German and Italian Fascism? Didn't we have to fight them? Similarly with our current war-mongers and empire builders, with American Fascism, if you will. They must be faced with real opposition, although not necessarily military opposition, which actually is not even an option for us, given that it is so impossible for poor people to acquire the weapons. It is thus ineffective to even think about fighting a war in traditional terms, as this is not a possible, nor a winning, strategy. All the same, the rulers' power to exploit, oppress, murder, and wage war must be destroyed. We need to come up with a strategy for doing this. It certainly cannot be done merely by taking to the streets, holding candlelight vigils, or exposing their hypocrisy. The war must be fought, to be sure, but fought in new ways, ways that are within our means and that can lead to victory.

***The urgent need to reassemble ourselves to take power away from criminals.***

I believe that there is a way to defeat this global ruling class, but it means that we have to reassemble ourselves socially on a massive scale. We have to gather ourselves together in directly democratic, face-to-face deliberative assemblies at work, at home, and in our neighborhoods. This would give us a foundation from which to begin draining power and wealth away from the ruling class. Without these social forms, we are necessarily restricted to all the various forms of reformism, restricted to trying to work through NGOs or state and national governments, to changing ruling class behavior, to making moral appeals, or to seeking to get or reverse certain legislation. But by reorganizing ourselves into a multitude of small, decentralized, directly democratic, face-to-face, local assemblies, coalesced together into inter-regional associations by means of voluntary treaties, we can begin to take back control of our lives and communities, and get the ruling class off our backs.

I have sketched out this strategy in my book *Getting Free*<sup>14</sup>, and have discussed there in some detail its various implications. As long as the world is organized on the basis of governments and corporations, nations and profit, there will never be peace, justice, freedom, or democracy. Our

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<sup>14</sup>James Herod, *Getting Free: Creating an Association of Democratic Autonomous Neighborhoods* (2007) is available from AK Press.

task is nothing less than to get rid of the social order we live in, and to create another one to take its place. If we fail to do this now, we will shortly find ourselves living in a full-fledged world fascist empire a thousand times more powerful and sophisticated than the Nazis ever could have been, and from which it will be next to impossible to escape.

#### **Further Reading on Selected Topics**

##### *On US Interventions Abroad*

William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (Common Courage, 1995, 457 pages).

##### *On Terrorism*

Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (South End Press, 1982, 252 pages).

##### *On Fascism*

David McGowan, *Understanding the F-Word: American Fascism and the Politics of Illusion* (iUniverse, 2001, 276 pages).

##### *Patriot Act*

Analyses of the USA Patriot Act of 2001 can be found on the web sites of the American Civil Liberties Union ([www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)) and the Electronic Frontier Foundation ([www.eff.org](http://www.eff.org)).

##### *On fundamentalism*

Fotis Terzakis, "Irrationalism, Fundamentalism, and Religious Revival: The Colors of the Chess-Board," *Democracy and Nature*, Vol 4, Nos. 2/3 (Issue 11/12, no date, but c.1998), also available on the Internet at: ([www.democracynature.org/dn/vol4/terzakis\\_irrationalism.htm](http://www.democracynature.org/dn/vol4/terzakis_irrationalism.htm)).

Colin Ward, "Fundamentalism", *The Raven*, No. 27 (Freedom Press) on the Net at ([www.ecn.org/freedom/Raven/fund.html](http://www.ecn.org/freedom/Raven/fund.html)).

Frederick Clarkson, *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle between Theocracy and Democracy* (Common Courage, 1996, 277 pages).

##### *On Empire*

Michael Parenti, *Against Empire* (City Lights, 1995, 216 pages).

Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (Verso, 1999, 230 pages).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2001, 478 pages).

Joseph Gerson and Bruce Birchard, editors, *The Sun Never Sets: Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases* (South End Press, 1991, 389 pages).

##### *On Afghanistan*

A few of the better essays on the attack on Afghanistan, which for the most part don't make the mistake of thinking that the US government doesn't know what it's doing, are (all dates are from 2001): Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St Clair, "Bush's Wars", *Counterpunch*, Sept 21 (plus many more fine essays on this crisis by these authors posted on *Counterpunch* web site: [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)); John Pilger, "Hidden Agenda Behind War on Terror," *Mirror* /uk, October 29 (plus many other excellent essays, at <http://pilger.carlton.com/print>); Michel Chossudovsky, "Osamagate," (posted October 9, at [www.globalresearch.ca/articles/CHO110A.print.html](http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/CHO110A.print.html)); Francis A. Boyle, "No War Against Afghanistan!" Oct 18 ([msanews.nynet.net/Scholars/Boyle/nolwar.html](http://msanews.nynet.net/Scholars/Boyle/nolwar.html)); Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," the *Nation*, October 22; Sitaram Yechury, "America, Oil, and Afghanistan," *The Hindu*, October 13; Edward S. Herman, "Antiterrorism as a Cover for Terrorism," ([www.zmag.org/hermancover.htm](http://www.zmag.org/hermancover.htm)); Arundhati Roy, "War Is Peace," *Outlook*, Oct. 18 (later published in the *Guardian*, Oct 23);

Sunera Thobani, "War Frenzy," ([www.neravt.com/left/thobani.html](http://www.neravt.com/left/thobani.html)); Michael Parenti, "Terrorism Meets Reactionism," ([www.michaelparenti.org/Terrorism.html](http://www.michaelparenti.org/Terrorism.html)); George Monbiot, "America's Pipe Dream," *Guardian* /uk, Oct 23); Jared Israel, Rick Rozoff & Nico Varkevissar, "Why Washington Wants Afghanistan," (posted Sept 18, on [www.emperors-clothes.com/analysis/afghan.htm](http://www.emperors-clothes.com/analysis/afghan.htm)); Sean Healy, "The Empire wants war, not justice," (no date, [www.zmag.org/healywar.htm](http://www.zmag.org/healywar.htm)); Noam Chomsky, "The New War Against Terror," Oct 18 ([www.zmag.org/GlobalWatch/chomskymit.htm](http://www.zmag.org/GlobalWatch/chomskymit.htm)); Patrick Martin, "US-Uzbekistan pact sheds light on Washington's war aims in Central Asia," *World Socialist Web Site* ([www.wsws.org/articles/2001/oct2001/uzbe-o18\\_pm.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/oct2001/uzbe-o18_pm.shtml)); Nick Beams, "Behind the 'anti-terrorism' mask: imperialist powers prepare new forms of colonialism," *World Socialist Web Site*, Oct 18 ([www.wsws.org/articles/2001/oct2001/imp-o18\\_pm.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/oct2001/imp-o18_pm.shtml)); Vijay Prashad, "War against the Planet," (no date, [www.zmag.org/prashcalam.htm](http://www.zmag.org/prashcalam.htm)); Stan Goff, "The So-Called Evidence is a Farce," October 10, *Narco News* ([www.narconews.com/goff1.html](http://www.narconews.com/goff1.html)); Al Giordano, "Washington's 'Terrorist' List: Road through Afghanistan leads to Colombia," Oct 1, *Narco NewsA-Info News ServiceAl-Ahram*, 18-24 October ([www.ahram.org/eg/weekly/2001/556/op9](http://www.ahram.org/eg/weekly/2001/556/op9)); Renfrey Clarke, "War on terrorism or war on the Third World?," *Green Left*, Oct 17 ([www.greenleft.org.au/current/467p16.htm](http://www.greenleft.org.au/current/467p16.htm)); Robin Blackburn, "Road to Armageddon," *Counterpunch*, Oct 3. All web site addresses valid as of October, 2001. ([www.narconews.com/war2.html](http://www.narconews.com/war2.html)); Chicago Area Anarchists, "Anarchists against the expansion of capitalism and the war," ([www.infoshop.org/inews/stories.php?story=01/10/25/7453849](http://www.infoshop.org/inews/stories.php?story=01/10/25/7453849)); Jared Israel, "Washington Plots, Moscow Crawls, Kabul Burns," ([www.emperors-clothes.com/misc/burns](http://www.emperors-clothes.com/misc/burns)); Hani Shukrallah, "Capital Strikes Back," ([www.neravt.com/left](http://www.neravt.com/left)).

The following web sites have extensive links covering September Eleven, Afghanistan, and the so-called war on terrorism: *Common Dreams News Center* ([www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)), *Znet* ([www.zmag.org/znet.htm](http://www.zmag.org/znet.htm)), *Jay's Leftist and Progressive Internet Directory*, *Alternet* ([www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org)), *Counterpunch* ([www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)), *Mid-Atlantic Info Shop* ([www.infoshop.org/news](http://www.infoshop.org/news)); *Global Circle Net News* ([www.globalcircle.net](http://www.globalcircle.net)).

#### Footnotes

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



James Herod  
A Stake, Not a Mistake  
On Not Seeing the Enemy  
October 2001

[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)