



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

Print Post Publication Number 381667 00258

Vol.39, No.9

March 14th, 2003

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"Why is it that waging war is unjustified until the UN decrees that the war is justified? What makes the UN the moral arbitrator that justifies the killing of people and destruction of a nation's property? The UN was the organisation that was going to have us beating our swords into ploughs and our spears into pruning hooks. Now the UN seems to be the world sponsor of war."*

– Neville Brigg, *"Central Coast Herald"*, March 2003

OBLIVIOUS TO APPROACHING CATASTROPHE by Jeremy Lee:

Like children playing with a live hand grenade, the leaders of "the coalition of the willing" play unknowingly with the history of their times. The rest of the world looks on aghast, hardly knowing whether warning protests will hasten or reduce the danger.

The Weekend Australian (8-9/3/03) told us that President Bush was praying:

"... My faith sustains me, because I pray daily," he declared to the nation at his rare prime-time press conference last night, a little teary-eyed at the thought of all the people he didn't know who were praying for him. 'I pray for guidance and wisdom and strength.'

"Should he commit troops, he'd pray for them – and for the innocent Iraqis. 'I pray for peace,' he added..."

Which seems disingenuous, to say the least, when the decision for life or death is in his hands! Many a leader in history has evoked divine aid when going to war and more than once adversaries have sought victory against each other from the same Deity. There is no doubt that individual combatants have had prayers for protection answered. Too many examples, from Generals to humble privates, can testify to this. But it is another matter to pray for innocent victims while at the same time setting the machinery of war in motion.

The Christian God, the Holy Trinity, is the epitome of peace, mercy and succour. It seems a growing number, exhausted of any belief that war brings peace, are turning their cheeks to the gun and the bomb.

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Should the US, tailed by Britain and Australia, go to war despite the United Nations, they have only the vaguest notion of the domestic revulsion and protest they will unleash.

Factored in to the current situation are the combined prayers of hundreds of thousands round the world. His Holiness the Pope has made his position, and the official position of the Catholic Church quite clear. He has sent his envoy to the White House to convey that position to President Bush. The new Archbishop of Canterbury, Rohan Williams, is equally opposed to war. While protests continue in the streets, Catholics assembled in their cathedral in Sydney to add their prayers for peace. The same has happened in a number of other churches.

It is not, as President Bush would have us believe, a decision beyond his control. There is absolutely nothing to say that war against Iraq, with its horrific aftermath, can be construed as a legitimate Christian position.

Nobody can say what is going to happen. On the surface it appears that the world once again faces war. But a considerable body of prayer worldwide simply asks for Divine intervention to frustrate any and all plans for war. It would seem at this stage as though such prayers have already been partly answered. With the greatest fire-power the world has ever seen poised to annihilate Iraq, one delay after another has dogged the once-confident decision-makers who, not so long ago, saw war as a mere matter of course.

Never has the simple petition "Deliver us from evil" had so much meaning.

TURKEY CAVES IN: After initially rebuffing the US demand for a staging base to invade northern Iraq, Turkey has finally succumbed. The price was money and debt relief. Commentator Mehmet Ali Birand, writing in the *Turkish Daily News* on March 1st said it all:

"When you are poor, when your creditors hang on your door, you find yourself helpless. Your powers of resistance start to ebb. You have to speak in an intimidated manner, when confronted with your creditors' proposals.

"This is because you know very well that the moment you say 'no' officials from the bailiff's office may knock on your door. You may find yourself unable to even feed your family.

"So, whether you like it or not, you accept the demands the other side makes. Then you say, Damn this poverty!

"Look at the spot we are today. As a result of so many years of mismanagement our debts – domestic and foreign – have climbed to \$200 billion. This year's debt servicing alone will amount to \$73 billion.

*"The markets are waiting for the reply to be given to the United States. It is public knowledge that if the reply turns out to be negative, this will play havoc with the markets ..." (carried in *The Australian Financial Review*, 3/3/03)*

One wonders whether President Bush prays for free choice for Turkey in his daily prayers? There seems little doubt that global debt is a strategic weapon in the hands of the money-lenders in their quest for even greater control. Which brings us to Australia, where net foreign debt has risen to \$354 billion – about \$18,000 per head for every man, woman and child in the country.

AUSTRALIA'S TRADE POSITION SLIDING: The drought has been seized on by Treasurer Costello as a major excuse for Australia's record trade deficit. But the problem is much deeper. John Garnaut, writing in the Weekend edition (18-19/1/03) of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, pointed out:

"....Australia's trade performance hasn't just hit an air pocket, it has crashed. So what's going on?"

"Last week the acting Minister for Trade, John Anderson, implied that the drought accounted for 91 per cent of the deterioration in exports so far in this financial year.

"It sounds reasonable, but it's not true. A researcher for the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics said the effects of drought were 'only just beginning to show up'.

"There's a strong possibility that the effect of drought will get worse on the monthly trade balance,' the researcher said. The export figures are actually worse if rural commodities are not included.

"Before he spoke of drought, Trade Minister Mark Vaile said the deteriorating trade performance only reflected the weakness of the global economy next to our own.

"That's not true either...."

Garnaut pointed out that our trade position in comparison to other countries in the Asia-Pacific, was woeful. Our exports to China, which had expanded in 2000-01, had dropped to a standstill, and China was importing more from other countries. For the rest of Asia, our exports had shrunk 5 per cent. Exports to India had fallen 6 per cent. To Japan 7 per cent. And our exports to the US - our so called 'free trade' friend - have shrunk by 8 per cent.

And of course as imports stay steady, or rise, the trade gap looms large. Garnaut finished his January article:

".... It's too early to tell why Australia's 20 year export boom came to an abrupt halt in 2001, but it is likely that the problem is about to get a whole lot worse If yesterday's 12 per cent rise in December imports is any guide, the Government had better steel itself for a torrid 12 months on the trade front.

"It's just going to blow the trade account out of the water,' says Westpac economist Huw McKay, who expects a record trade deficit of \$2 billion for December...."

In the event, the December trade deficit was over \$3 billion. And the worst is yet to come.

THE REFUSENIKS IN ISRAEL: Although the violence and terror under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon continues to escalate in Israel, it is easy to overlook the presence of a minority of courageous soldiers who have spoken out against current policies. Ed O'Loughlin (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, [Weekend] 8-9/2/03) wrote of the 520 Israeli reservists who signed an open letter declaring they refused to serve in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza. 121 of these have now served jail sentences for their refusal to serve. In January a full time intelligence officer was dismissed for withholding information he felt would result in the deaths of innocent Palestinians.

"....For Major Chen Alon, and the other 519 signatories of last year's 'Courage to Refuse' letter, the whole occupation is illegal and wrong. 'We are all frontline combat soldiers, Zionist patriots and willing to defend their country and fight against any real aggression against the State of Israel, but we

are not willing to humiliate and starve and expel and repress 3 million people,' Major Alon says. Major Alon received his last call up 18 months ago, after the outbreak of the current intifada. He recently served 21 days in military prison for his refusal to go back.

"'We were in Bethlehem,' he recalls. 'One night we demolished the house of an innocent Palestinian family where the only crime was building an illegal balcony or something. After that we were firing tank shells into private houses and we wounded several people I realized then that our presence was only to get a few more people killed or wounded, to keep the war going on. The occupation for me is many horrible details, of curfews and sieges and children who can't go to school.'"

The importance of small minorities, even single individuals, prepared to speak out and, if necessary, suffer for the truth, cannot be overestimated. They are a threat to the power-wielders who demand total obedience, and who fear dissent of any kind.

FEARFUL PARTY SHEEP ON THE BACK BENCH: One of the most frightening aspects of parliamentary performance at the moment is the resounding silence of Coalition and Opposition backbenchers on whether or not Australia should go to war. One would think the debate is confined to John Howard and Simon Crean, with the occasional comment from Bob Brown. Are we really to believe that every Liberal and National, in their heart of hearts, uncritically accept the views of their leaders, and feel justified in consequence in remaining silent? It is a travesty of true representative government, and will not change until a minority of voters takes steps to wrinkle out the cowardice of silence in their representatives. As well as national polls and other forms of protest, we need a polling team in each electorate, aimed at the local member of parliament, so that his or her personal views are passed on to electors.

DIVYING UP THE SPOILS ALREADY! Reuters online (Houston, 6/3/03) released the news that an American Defense Department source said the Halliburton Company subsidiary, Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR) has won the contract to oversee any fire fighting operations at Iraqi oilfields after any US led invasion. Readers will remember Vice President Dick Cheney served as Halliburton's chief executive officer from 1995 to 2000.

SUSPECTS DIED IN INTERROGATIONS – from Andrew Gumbel's website, Los Angeles, USA, March 7th, 2003. American military officials acknowledged yesterday that two prisoners captured in Afghanistan in December had been killed while under interrogation at Bagram air base north of Kabul – reviving concerns that the US is resorting to torture in its treatment of Taliban fighters and suspected al-Qa'ida operatives.

A spokesman for the air base confirmed that the official cause of death of the two men was "homicide", contradicting earlier accounts that one had died of a heart attack and the other from a pulmonary embolism.

The men's death certificates, made public earlier this week, showed that one captive, known only as Dilawar, 22, from the Khost region, died from "blunt force injuries to lower extremities complicating coronary artery disease" while another captive, Mullah Habibullah, 30, suffered from blood clot in the lung that was exacerbated by a "blunt force injury".

The western world certainly has advanced fast to barbarism.

"ON TARGET" is printed and published by The Australian League of Rights, 145 Russell St., Melbourne.
Postal Address: GPO Box 1052, Melbourne, 3001. Telephone: (03) 9650 9749, Fax: (03) 9650 9368.
Subscription \$40.00 p.a.