



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"Because the signs of our times point to a struggle between absolutes we may expect the future to be a time of trials and catastrophes for two reasons: firstly, to stop disintegration. Godlessness would go on and on if there were no catastrophes... God will not allow unrighteousness to become eternal. Revolution, disintegration, chaos must be reminders that our thinking has been wrong, our dreams have been unholy. Moral truth is vindicated by the ruin that follows when it has been repudiated. Adversity is the expression of God's condemnation of evil, the registering of Divine Judgment. As hell is not sin, but the effect of sin, so these disordered times are not sin, but the wages of sin, catastrophe reveals that evil is self-defeating; we cannot turn from God without hurting ourselves."* – Bishop Fulton Sheen in *"Communism and the Conscience of the West"*, 1948

THE TANGLED WEB UNFOLDS by Jeremy Lee:

Past sins and prevarications are slowly catching up with the Howard Government. It is going to be extremely difficult to ignore questions about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the true position in Afghanistan, and security in SE Asia now that the euphoria about war is behind us. With inquiries now under way in Britain, the US and Australia there will be a steady flow of information crossing from one investigation to another.

It is all very well for the UK's Geoffrey Hoon and Australia's Alexander Downer to say that the evidence of WMDs will soon turn up – it's only a matter of time. Had they been any threat to the rest of the world – if they even exist – they would have had to be in a position for ready deployment. Buried in some remote location, they obviously were not so.

In all three western allies prominent people with no axe to grind gave warnings of faulty intelligence *before* the first shots were fired. In Australia, intelligence officer Andrew Wilkie had nothing to gain from aborting his own career on a matter of principle. In Britain, former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and fellow minister Claire Short could have behaved like the 'tame-cat' backbenchers in Australia and just kept silent, whatever their misgivings. But their stand, and current public statements must be salt in Tony Blair's wounds. Both are adamant that he selected the intelligence that would support a predetermined decision to go to war. Blair has been careless with the truth, which is unforgivable in a Prime Minister consigning his troops into action.

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Now in the United States President Bush's reputation has been severely dented by one of the most experienced intelligence analysts in the country. Mr. Rand Beers, who served under four presidents on the National Security Council, resigned just before the Iraqi war claiming the State Department's policy was making the US less, rather than more, secure.

"I saw the things that weren't being done. And the longer I sat and watched, the more concerned I became," he told the Washington Post. "The administration wasn't matching its deeds to its words in the war on terrorism," Mr. Beers said "They're making us less secure." ..." (The Australian, 18/6/03)

With 36 years experience in intelligence analysis, until recently as Bush's special assistant on combating terrorism, Beers said he had never felt so strongly about anything as he did about the need for change in America's current policy.

".... The theme of his criticisms are familiar in Europe: that the US focus on Iraq has allowed the terrorist network al Qu'ida off the hook; that the US is losing the peace in Afghanistan and has failed to pressure Saudi Arabia to crack down on terrorist funding"

All these claims and counter-claims are going to haunt Prime Minister Howard and his henchmen before it is all over. He may be able to dominate Parliament for a little while longer, with the implicit obedience of the Liberals and Nationals. But he cannot stop the avalanche of unsavoury evidence that will be coming from overseas. Apart from evidence in Britain and the US, Australians are now seeing evidence, night after night, that the war has not been won in Iraq; and that much of Afghanistan is back in the hands of the Taliban.

Both Howard and Downer now appear anxious and defensive. Well might they be so. There is no way they can hide or control the mass of evidence still to come about events in the Middle East.

If ever we needed evidence of the value of the Senate, it can be seen in the establishment of the inquiry, against the wishes of Prime Minister Howard.

THE SCRAMBLE FOR IRAQI CONTRACTS: The recent war in Iraq cost somewhere between \$US 60 and 70 billion. The rebuilding process is estimated to be at least \$100 billion, possibly going as high as \$180 billion. It's amazing how much damage can be done in a few short weeks.

Hitherto, the US has been adamant that it will keep sole control over post-war Iraq. But that means it will have to foot the bill on its own. And it's already hurting. The troops are going to have to remain on police duty for a long time to come. They are being subjected to a tense and dangerous environment to carry out civil duties for which they have not been trained. It appears there will be a steady number of 'incidents' in which US soldiers are shot or bombed.

To begin with, rebuilding contracts went to huge US corporations without public tender. Included were Halliburton and Bechtel, associated with prominent figures in the State Department.

If the US is to attract any international funding for the rebuilding process it will have to relinquish its monopoly and allow bodies such as the United Nations and the World Bank to become involved. But that's the last thing the US wants to do.

Over 4,000 companies worldwide, including 77 from Australia, are lined up for lucrative contracts in Iraq. Currently, they will only obtain sub-contracts from the giant US firms. Only one Australian

company has succeeded, Patrick Corporation, which has been sub-contracted to the US firm SkyLink Air & Logistics, for the rebuilding of Baghdad Airport.

If international bodies such as the UN and the World Bank were given responsibility for rebuilding, all that would change. It would no longer be a US 'closed shop'. Tendering opportunities would be spread around.

Halliburton, which majors on oil infrastructure, already has a firm foothold in the Iraqi oil industry, which was and is a strong US priority. A Halliburton subsidiary based in Adelaide, Kellogg, Brown and Root, is angling for some Iraqi contracts "on behalf of Australian companies". But they're not Australian at all, even though (currently) based here. They're part of the multinational invasion that has decimated Australian industries over recent years.

AusAid, the Australian aid agency, has earmarked some \$100 million for Iraq. \$55 million has already been allocated for immediate humanitarian needs, and \$45 million committed for rebuilding. But this amount will be channelled through international bodies such as the World Bank or the UN.

Now another problem has arisen. Overseas companies looking for juicy contracts in Iraq must be able to depend on a peaceful environment in which to work. But the current scene is anything but peaceful. Working in a hostile population, with spasmodic outbursts of looting, shootings and bombings, companies must be sure that the safety of their workers is paramount. This isn't so at the moment, and the scramble for Iraqi contracts has slowed considerably.

IS WAR A GLOBAL 'MAKE-WORK' SCHEME? Looked at as a big picture, surely we must ask whether the hugely-destructive wars of the 21st Century are not designed to alleviate the ever-encroaching problem of unemployment? What logic can there be in blasting an entire country to smithereens in a few short weeks, and then award 'golden' contracts round the world to rebuild that which has been destroyed? America has done it in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and now Iraq. In a frenzied 'growth' economic policy environment, destruction is a vital part of the process. It results in ever-growing industrial opportunities! If the gigantic productive capacity of companies like Bechtel and Halliburton are not rebuilding shattered infrastructure somewhere in the world, what else could they be doing? Downsizing their workforces? Putting machines into mothballs? Accepting smaller profits?

It's crazy, but war makes job-creation a reality. What matter if the world bankrupts itself in the process? That's something for the next generation to figure out.

Even Bali must have offered some fat contracts to the rebuilders. The only people who won't benefit are those who live there – and the victims whose lives were shattered.

THE MILITARY BASES OF TOMORROW: Behind all the froth and bubble of "rebuilding", the imperial military machine of the US steadily expands. In an article headed US SHIFTS TROOPS TO CAUCUSUS AND AFRICA, *The Australian Financial Review* (12/6/03) said:

"The Pentagon plans to significantly shrink the US force of 70,000 troops in Germany, a military stronghold for half a century, and put far more American forces in Africa and the Caucasus region.

"The push, part of the most radical redeployment of American forces since the end of the Cold War, is driven by the increasing importance the US is placing on protecting key oil reserves in Africa and the Caucasus region near the Caspian Sea, as well as addressing concerns about fighting terrorism.

"Pentagon officials say they expect final decisions to be made in the coming months and that troops could begin moving in about a year...."

"In the Caucasus region, defence officials said the US was likely to have as many as 15,000 troops, some rotating through small, spartan bases in places such as Azerbaijan. Most of them, however, would move through larger, but still relatively bare-bones facilities in Romania and Bulgaria near ports on the Black Sea."

"In the Caspian Sea you have large mineral reserves We want to be able to assure the long-term viability of those resources'"

"In Africa, the defence officials said, the US could increase its presence to as many as 5,000 to 6,500 troops from about 1,500 Marines and special operations soldiers based in Djibouti. The troops would use as many as a dozen semi-permanent bases in Africa"

The last great Imperial Power is stretching to span the globe, wherever oil, minerals and markets exist. Like all great empires, they over-stretch themselves, goaded by the hatred and animosity they generate in the course of their expansion.

The Money Empire, which controls friend and foe alike in the tentacles of its debt web, then moves to its next victim.

IN EFFECT, LABOR GIVES ASIO NEW POWERS: The Labor caucus voted unanimously to support the Coalition's controversial ASIO Bill, although such constitutional authorities as Greg Carne of the University of Tasmania said the legislation put Australia beyond the norm of other common law democracies. (*The Australian*, June 18th, 2003).

What this will mean in effect:

- ASIO will be able to detain without charge anybody over 18 thought to have information about terrorism.
- Anyone aged 16 to 18 can be detained if they are suspected of direct involvement in terrorism.
- People detained under the bill can be held for up to seven days and questioned for three blocks of eight hours with breaks in between.
- They will face up to five years' gaol for refusing to answer questions or answering inaccurately.
- The new regime will last for three years, parliament then to decide on further anti-terrorist powers for ASIO.

Winding back human rights and civil liberties:

In a further sign of the encroaching 'police state,' the telecommunications Interception Report, recently tabled in parliament revealed a 17 per cent increase in the number of warrants issued last year.

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