



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

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THOUGHTS FOR THE WEEK:

"Death is to be chosen before slavery and base deeds." – Roman, Cicero.

"Death is better for every man than life with shame." – Anglo Saxon, Beowulf.

"To take no notice of a violent attack is to strengthen the heart of the enemy. Vigour is valiant, but cowardice is vile." – Ancient Egyptian, Pharaoh Senusert 3rd.

"There are two kinds of injustice; the first is found in those who do an injury, the second in those who fail to protect another from injury when they can." – Roman, Cicero.

WHY AUSTRALIA GOES TO WAR by Jeremy Lee:

It is interesting to note the gradually changing reasons offered by the Prime Minister for the recent war in Iraq. He now finds himself in conflict, not so much with the Labor Party, for which he has always had a healthy contempt, but with his partners in "the Coalition of the Willing", Tony Blair and George Bush, who are very much on the defensive about their intelligence sources. Both have publicly conceded that claims prior to the war were wrong. It wouldn't matter so much if weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq. But they haven't, making the whole edifice of "incontrovertible evidence" flimsy and contrived. Blair is in real trouble in his own Parliament, from his own party, and both Republicans and Democrats in the US are asking penetrating questions about Bush and his White House 'cabal'.

Now we have the Office of National Assessments in Australia making an unprecedented public statement that it had evidence that one of Prime Minister Howard's claims prior to the war was wrong, but that it hadn't told him.

Will anyone be sacked? We doubt it.

Howard's current stated reasons for war have shifted from "a threat to the world" to "humanitarian intervention". In other words, it is our duty to liberate other nations from brutal dictators. All dictators? Or just those that might offer a future threat to our security? Like the Solomons?

All very noble, of course. But why not take Australians into his confidence? What about Mugabe in Zimbabwe? Is he less brutal than Saddam Hussein?

IN THIS ISSUE: • *Thought for the Week* • *Why Australia Goes To War* • *The Picture In Zimbabwe* • *Unpatriotic? Not So!*

THE PICTURE IN ZIMBABWE: A recent e-mail from a contact in Zimbabwe provides a picture which should nudge Howard's zeal for humanitarian military action:

"No transport, no fuel, no power, just sackfuls of banknotes – a report from a collapsing nation.

My maid, Nyarai, failed to turn up for work yesterday. There was no public transport and private minibuses have doubled their charges since a 283 per cent increase in petrol prices a month ago. She was unable to call because the telephone boxes no longer work. Nyarai would have come if she could. Her boyfriend is on forced leave because the textile factory where he works as a machinist can work only half time because of power cuts.

Zimbabwe is a country rich in resources and with great potential. It used to have a well-oiled infrastructure that even South Africa, with its far bigger economy, envied. It was robust enough to withstand the first two decades of President Mugabe's rule but it has now reached the point of collapse. An advanced society is returning to the primitive.

Turn-of-the-switch technology for heating, cooking and water is being replaced by fuel-gathering, wood fires and water collection on foot. The bizarre and dysfunctional is the norm and very little surprises people. The expression "the wheels have come off" is on everyone's lips.

In Colquhoun Avenue, an upmarket area of embassies and apartment blocks, a young man uses a long metal rod to break twigs from trees for kindling. On Samora Machel Avenue, hundreds of battered white Japanese minibuses – the core of Harare's commuter street – form a mile-long queue for petrol. Roads into the city from townships on the outskirts are thronged with people who have to walk to work.

The country's sole sugar refinery closed this week. There is ample locally-grown raw sugar but no coal for the refining process. Wankie Colliery, the state-owned company that sits on one of the world's biggest coalfields, has suspended production. The massive dragline that scoops opencast coal was halted when it ran out of spares. There is no foreign currency to import new ones.

Harare Hospital, which serves the capital's townships, is on the verge of closing. Unable to purchase coal, the hospital has its boilers out of action and cannot sterilize instruments, launder bedding or cook food. Air Zimbabwe, the state-owned airline, could soon be grounded. It confirmed this week that it had only "two or three days" of fuel. That is more than most motorists have. A two or three day wait in a fuel queue no longer ensures a full tank. Most queues outside service stations are referred to as "hope queues", where people leave their cars for a week at a time.. When a petrol tanker arrives, bedlam erupts. Opportunists cut in front of those who have waited. Fights break out and sometimes shots are fired.. Riot police arrive late, blaming the fuel shortage.

In the past month, the South African and Mozambican utility companies that supply Zimbabwe with power have declared the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority, the state company run by Mr. Mugabe's brother-in-law, as an "interruptible customer" because of its failure to service its 22 million-pound debt. This means that the company gets only ten minutes' notice of power cuts.

Factory machinery jerks to a halt. Companies moulding tyres or plastics are left with hard, useless

lumps oozing from moulds. The Zimbabwe Chamber of Commerce estimates that fuel and electricity crises have cut industrial output to 35 per cent of normal. Officially inflation is running at 228 per cent. In reality it is out of control. The official exchange rate is 824 Zimbabwe dollars to one US dollar but on the black market it is 2,200. A white loaf cost five Zimbabwe dollars in 1998; it now costs 350. A businessman carjacked in the affluent suburb of Borrowdale last month offered ten million dollars as reward for his year-old Mercedes SUV. That was the sum listed in the national budget ten years ago for procuring vehicles for the entire police force. The central bank still refuses to print denominations bigger than 500 dollars. At banks, depositors line up with sacks of money. At the withdrawal counter, tellers and customers can barely see each other over the wall of notes.

The 500 dollar note is nicknamed the Ferrari because it is red and goes fast. It is disappearing from the streets as people hoard it. The central bank is not printing more because it has no foreign currency to import the high-quality watermarked paper and silver strips. Commercial bank officials say that it costs 700 Zimbabwe dollars to print a single 500 dollar note. This week a bank told a businessman who buys large quantities of cotton in peasant areas that it could offer him only 50 dollar notes. "He laughed," the bank manager said. "He says he needs one billion dollars a week. In fifties, that's 40 cubic metres of banknotes".

This week it cost me 2,750 dollars to airmail a letter to Britain containing 3 A4 sheets of paper. I covered the back and front of the envelope with 100 dollar stamps – the highest denomination – except for a small patch where I wrote the address. Interestingly, the stamp features a pretty sketch of the Tokwe Mukorsi dam, which has not been built because Cabinet Ministers have been fighting over bribes for the lucrative tender for the past 15 years.

The cheapest telephone call is now 24 dollars, but the largest coin is 5 dollars. The coin boxes in busy public telephones would fill much faster than the post office could collect the coins, so they have been removed. They would be replaced by computer chip card phones "depending on the availability of foreign currency", a spokesman said.

Signs of poverty: Life expectancy at birth: 42.9 years, down from 56.0 years in 1975.
Proportion of children dying before they are five: 11.7 per cent.
Proportion of adult population with HIV/Aids in 2001: 33.7 per cent.

COMMENT BY J.LEE: Called up on national service in a British Territorial regiment in 1953, I did my basic six-months training in Salisbury (now Harare). Rhodesia as it was then was a beautiful, prosperous and stable country, self-governed, with a seemingly prosperous future for all races. Rhodesians were conscious that their own troops – black and white – were serving alongside Australians in the Malayan Campaign, where the Communists were defeated.

Twelve years later, under incredible outside pressure for "one-man-one-vote" democracy, Rhodesia declared independence, under the leadership of Battle-of-Britain war ace Ian Smith and a cabinet all of whom had served in World War II

Against both world economic and trade sanctions – in which Australia participated – and terrorist warfare directed from outside its borders, Rhodesia survived, built many industries, became almost totally self-sufficient and fed its people. At the time of its independence thousands of Australians and New Zealander contributed to the delivery of a tanker of petrol to the Rhodesians, organized by the

Australian League of Rights, as a symbol of affection and kinship. This hit the world news, and those who had contributed were labelled "racists" and "nazis" for their trouble. When the war ended a decade later, Rhodesia had no foreign debt.

Terrorist leader Robert Mugabe became President. The legacy he will leave the country he re-named Zimbabwe can be seen in the letter above. All that remains when he is overthrown, or flees, is for the multinationals and international agencies such as the IMF and World Bank to move in and complete the slavery of the once-happy and prosperous people of Rhodesia.

Unless, of course, the "Coalition of the Willing" – perhaps this time led by Australia's John Howard and his henchman Alexander Downer – sets out to "liberate" Zimbabwe in the same fashion as it has "liberated" Iraq. Surely we can find evidence of some threatening weapons of mass destruction? Perhaps uranium-depleted knob-kerries? Or it may be Mugabe is secretly buying enriched uranium from Timbuktu?

The ghastly mess that is Africa today – from East to West and North to South – should not be laid at the feet of long-past colonial regimes, as is so often done; but the international agencies and money-lenders who have helped return Africa to the jungle. Plus the elevation of crude dictators such as Mugabe to positions of total power.

UNPATRIOTIC? NOT SO! by Betty Luks:

We are sometimes accused of being unpatriotic because of our criticisms of western leaders such as Bush, Blair and Howard, and, because we disagree with Australia's involvement in the wars of aggression against, and occupation of, Afghanistan and Iraq. After all, we have been reminded by the letter writers, they are 'our' troops in the war zones. Yes, much to my shame.

My answer is summed up in a scene from Shakespeare's "*Henry V*":

King Henry's army captain Fluellen, in confirming his allegiance to his king declares: "By Chesu, I am your Majesty's countryman, I care not who know it; I will confess it to all the world: I need not to be ashamed of your majesty, praised be God, so long as your majesty is an honest man." To which Henry V replies: "God keep me so."

And there you have it. When the so-called 'leaders' of our 'so-called' Christian nations act with honesty and integrity we will not be ashamed – as we are now! When their policies are based on Christian civilised values, when we see their policies result in good fruit, instead of the evil fruit from wrong policies, when they practise the Golden Rule, they will be accorded respect.

Can Australian soldiers still legally claim 'following orders' as a defence?

I would also remind our readers, "following orders" as a defence was removed from the Australian War Crimes legislation, so that persons such as Ivan Polyukhovich could be tried for 'war crimes' within Australia. One wonders where that legally leaves our soldiers in any overseas conflict. To my knowledge the legislation still stands.

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