

The Bush family and Fundamentalist Islam

WHAT do you call a crowd of more than a million Shiite fundamentalists chanting anti-American slogans in Iraq? Here's where the spin reaches its pinnacle of twisted creativity. National Public Radio refers to this event as "Iraqis celebrating their newfound freedoms." And this in fact is an accurate description – but it's hardly the celebration of "liberation" the Bush administration and their cronies in the media would like us to believe it is. True liberation, you see, is normally followed by some sort of "thank you." This is more of a fuck you – now leave!

Pundits seem truly shocked that the Iraqis aren't welcoming their American "liberators" and rushing out to embrace American style shopping mall "democracy." Perhaps their ill feelings toward Americans might stem from their recent dose of "Shock and Awe." When the Germans originally developed this Nazi-era tactic and coined the phrase in their magazine, *Signal*, I don't think endearment or nation building was on their agenda. Shock and Awe worked as a military tactic for both the Americans and the Nazis. The Iraqis are now recovering from their shock – "something that jars the emotions as if with a violent unexpected blow," and awe – "an emotion of mingled reverence, dread and wonder." Trust and kinship toward the invading army really isn't the sort of results one would expect from such a campaign.

This Shock and Awe came on the tail of years of sporadic bombardment and devastating sanctions which crippled Iraq's infrastructure. According to a spokesperson

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for the US Agency for International Development, this led to the deaths of approximately 100,000 Iraqi children per year. Before that we had Gulf War I, where over 100,000 retreating Iraqis were incinerated on what we now term, "the highway of death." All the while Iraqis have been suffering at the hands of a psychopathic tyrant, Saddam Hussein, whose rise to power was aided and supported by the United States. So, of course they have no love for America.

A fundamentalist Iraq

Iraqis are doing what people the world over have done for thousands of years when faced with destruction, devastation and overwhelming force. They are turning to God. And they're doing it in a way that also demonstrates resistance to the invading culture. They're turning away from the secularism of Saddam Hussein and the United States, and toward the fundamentalism of the Taliban and the Iranians. For Iraq, democracy means the establishment of a fundamentalist religious state that in all likelihood will oppose the domination of hedonistic American consumerist culture.

This should come as no surprise to anyone with an elementary understanding of global politics. US intelligence agencies warned ad nauseum that a hasty destruction of the brutal Baath regime would lead to a fundamentalist regime. The alternative press also has been sounding this trumpet since the first Gulf War. Regular readers of the alternative media are not in the least bit surprised by this quite predictable outcome. No thinking person should be surprised that a US invasion of Iraq could only lead to two possible outcomes – indefinite occupation in one form or another, or the establishment of a fundamentalist state. We knew this before we went in: Bush's invasion would transform the region's most radically secular government into what could eventually become the most powerful fundamentalist force in the world.

The relationship between conservative fundamentalist Islam, the Bush family, and American political culture is quite fascinating. Fundamentalist Islam has played a pivotal role in shaping American politics for the last quarter century, ushering in the so-called "Reagan Revolution" and fundamentally changing core American values and political culture.

Fundamentalist Shiites for Reagan

The face of American politics began to change in November of 1979 when fundamentalist Shiite students in Iran captured the US embassy in Tehran, taking approximately 90 hostages. They were angered by US support of the brutal regime of the Shah, who was overthrown earlier that year, and the Carter administration's decision to allow the Shah

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to enter the US for medical treatment. The hostage crisis at first boosted President Carter's popularity, but as it dragged on, his popularity waned. Fifty-two of the original hostages were eventually held for 444 days, with Carter powerless to secure their release. The humiliating fiasco quickly dominated the US media and became the defining event of what was to become a failed presidency. For the first six months of the crisis, ABC, NBC and CBS dedicated about one third of their news hole to the stand-off. ABC created a daily 30 minute show entitled, "The Crisis in Iran: America Held Hostage." CBS ended their nightly newscasts with a tally of how many days the hostages had been held.

After a year of humiliation with "America held hostage" by a rag-tag group of Shiite radicals, Carter's popularity and the nation's confidence in his presidency plummeted. In November of 1980, a tough-talking Ronald Reagan seized the presidency with 50.75% of the popular vote and 91% of the Electoral College vote. George H.W. Bush was his Vice President. The Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush era of conservative corporate presidencies had begun.

Years later political scientists, historians and journalists started discovering evidence indicating that the Reagan/Bush campaign team had had secret meetings with the Shiite fundamentalist government of Iran before the election. They allege that the Reagan/Bush team reached an agreement with the Iranians, whereby the hostages would not be released before the US election – preventing Carter from benefiting from a popularity boost upon their release, and guaranteeing bad press for Carter up until the election.

If this is true, it amounts to nothing short of treason – endangering the lives of the American hostages, causing the nation undue suffering and humiliation, and ultimately hijacking the presidential election. The case is best outlined by Dr. Gary Sick, a former National Security Council staff member who served in the Ford, Carter and Reagan administrations. Sick, who also served for 24 years as a US naval intelligence officer before being recruited to the NSC by a Republican administration, compiled his evidence into a book, "The October Surprise," published in 1991 by Random House subsidiary, Times Books.

Sick reports of alleged meetings in July, 1980, between Ronald Reagan's campaign manager and ensuing CIA Director, William Casey, and officials of Iran's Shiite fundamentalist government. The deal called for immediate covert shipments of US military hardware to Iran, via Israel, prior to the 1980 election – and then directly from CIA operatives after Reagan had seized the White House. These arms sales are now documented history. Records of these transactions served as evidence to convict the felons associated with the Iran-Contra scandal. According to Sick, Casey reported directly to Reagan running mate and former CIA Director, George H.W. Bush. Disputed accounts

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place Bush in Paris in October, 1980, sealing the final phases of the agreement with the Iranians. Once George H.W. Bush became president, his Justice Department indicted the whistle-blower who placed Bush at that meeting on charges of making a false declaration to a Federal Judge. He was acquitted of all charges, as the government was unable to account for the whereabouts of Bush or Casey during the days the meeting allegedly took place – this despite the fact that it was just weeks before the election, and candidate Bush suddenly went MIA.

Whether or not the Reagan/Bush team cut a deal with the Iranians will always be a point of contention. What is clear, however, was that the fate of the US presidency in 1980 was in the hands of Shiite fundamentalists in Iran. Whether or not this issue ultimately decided the election, the decision that the Iranians made supported the Reagan/Bush candidacy. They released the hostages, as per the alleged agreement, hours after Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush were inaugurated. We now know that shipments of American weapons to Iran followed soon thereafter and continued for years, laying the foundation for the Reagan/Bush era Iran-Contra scandals. Both Reagan and Bush went on to work with Osama bin Laden, training and arming the movement that eventually brought the Taliban to power in Afghanistan and led to the formation of a global al Qaida movement.

Saving W's presidency

Now let's fast-forward to present times. George H.W. Bush's son, George "W" seizes the White House in 2001 in a contested race after losing the national popular vote, and by most accounts, the Florida primary to a lackluster Al Gore. Despite the clear absence of a mandate, the younger Bush sets out attacking environmental safeguards, public education, health programs for seniors and the poor, anti-poverty programs and America's traditional separation of church and state. He installs an anti-constitutionalist attorney general, further privatizes the public airwaves, loots the American treasury to fund corporate welfare and gives carte blanche to corporations to write international trade treaties – all while giving massive tax breaks to the ultra-rich as his Enron buddies plunge California into a fabricated energy crisis.

Despite a compliant media, George W. Bush – "W" – was in trouble. W's halting speech patterns, his embarrassing ignorance of world affairs and his propensity to say stupid things in front of microphones was dooming this unpopular president to the ashbin of history. In early September, the final complete Florida election recount, funded by a consortium of media groups, was about to be released – spelling doom for the junior Bush, who at the time was in the process of trying to prevent the scheduled release of the

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Reagan/Bush presidential papers, and all the Iran/Contra material that they contain. Then along came September 11th.

The "Attack on America," ostensibly the work of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists, changed everything. The younger Bush suddenly became a "wartime" president – with a new endless war being waged against ill-defined enemies on multiple fronts inhabiting various planes of reality. New York, the traditional seat of the "liberal East Coast Establishment" and the center of anti-Bush fundraising and political power, was suddenly economically devastated and living under a debilitating permanent "code orange" state of siege.

The Florida election, and the final complete tally showing Gore the winner, was now irrelevant news, slipping by under the radar. We were at war. And challenging a wartime president, the media reminded us, was unpatriotic. Patriotism aside, while everyone was distracted by the "war without end," the young Bush pushed ahead with his draconian domestic agenda. Suddenly anything was possible – and America's joke of a president became a celebrated communicator (it seems he's quite an adept speaker when given the opportunity to talk about killing – he just gets tongue tied talking about health or education). September 11th saved junior's presidency and the Bush family was once again riding high. Brother Jeb of Florida election mayhem fame was re-elected. Republicans swept in the mid-term congressional elections, and aided by the death of Paul Wellstone, succeeded in retaking the Senate.

Bush/Fundamentalist symbiosis

Bush used his newfound power to change American military doctrine from one that was at least rhetorically defensive, to that of an aggressor and invader, based on his notion of preemptive attacks. Within the year he hijacked the American military into a war, essentially to give control of secularist Iraq to Iranian-backed Shiite fundamentalists – a plum the Iranians could never win in battle without American help.

Despite the current occupation and the appointment of an American viceroy to preside over Iraq – make no mistake about it – eventually the majority of Iraqis, free from Saddam Hussein's tyranny, and filled with anti-American hatred, will form the Islamic state that they desire. And if this is what the majority of Iraqis want, then they have a right to achieve it.

The interesting thing is – in all likelihood, without the intervention of the US playing a scripted role as "Great Satan," they probably would have followed their own history and chosen a more liberal secularist path. The rise of Islamic extremism, which runs counter to Islam's more liberal and inclusive history, has only been possible thanks to the

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intervention of the United States operating under the tutelage of Ronald Reagan and the Bush clan. And, in turn, the fundamentalists, intentionally or not, have helped the Bush family rise to and maintain power against what should be overwhelming odds.

Reactionary US Regimes and Fundamentalist Islam work hand and hand forging an odd symbiosis. With the Bush administration diverting billions of dollars from domestic health and education programs to rebuild Iraq's public health and education systems, promising Iraqis the universal health care his administration denies to Americans, this relationship only promises to get more and more complex. ●