

# **Expanding the War Into the World and Into Our Minds.**

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The War on Terrorism is expanding, not just in terms of territory that is subject to bombing, but the war is expanding in terms of setting up US bases, ideology and propaganda. It is expanding what is considered acceptable in our communities, and in the world. Today I hope to look at this expansion and examples of what it means.

The US desire to expand their ongoing attack on Iraq is well know. What is lesser known is that the US has already installed itself in the Philippines, and is drastically increasing the amount of military sales and military 'aid' to that country (Amnesty International, 2). The US has had several thousand military personnel on the ground in the Philippines (CNN.com, 1). They were there on a short term agreement, but the two countries are now developing agreements to keep US 'advisors' and troops rotating through the Asian nation on what looks to be a fairly continuous basis. This despite the fact that the Philippine constitution prevents foreign troops on Philippine soil.

This involvement marks the largest US military intervention actually involved in combat in the Philippines since the Philippine-American War in 1899-1901 and the largest number of US troops for combat in the area since the end of the Moro War in 1911. Philippines remained a colony of the US after these very bloody invasions until 1991, when finally, after years of social resistance the US presence and military bases were pushed out (Shalom, 34-5).

Sadly, the removal of the US military hardly ended the story. Not just because the US has been trying to re-instate itself ever since, but also because the social impact

of those bases has lingered since their removal. In 1993 I was in Subic Bay, the sight of a former US base. I was swimming and cooling off with some friends. My friend was approached by a boy who was playing in the pool, maybe 5 or 6 years old, and he was selling sex. His parents and younger sister looked on knowingly and laughed. That disconnect between those parents and that child, and the way that child looked at me and my friends and didn't see people who wanted to be friendly and play with him, but only saw white adults which meant to him people who would want to pay to have sex with him. For me this was a devastating and revealing experience. I felt it was colonialism unmasked.

This was particularly mortifying for me when compared with the experience of meeting the children of workers and union activists in Negros, another Philippine island. In this village amongst a field of sugar cane, we saw a whole group of boys and girls, young teenagers, who wanted to do nothing but play with the infant who lived in the home that hosted us. Her name is Joy. They walked through the fields from school and we could hear them coming from a distance singing to her to let her know they were on their way. These workers were so dedicated to their children's well being that despite dire poverty and repressive anti-union forces, including murders of union activists, where they worked, set up their own schools for their children to avoid a colonized and repressive education in the company-run school. It was perhaps the most loved and cherished group of children I have ever encountered.

I wouldn't claim that Negros and Northern Luzon have the same culture, the cultures in the Philippines are incredibly diverse, but the vast difference in the treatment of those children really speaks to a massive loss. In my opinion the entire culture around Subic Bay had been sickened by the presence of the US military base.

Subic Bay is a dramatic example of a cycle that's very typical of the link between Globalization, the military and sexism, where IMF and World Bank regulations create poverty and force people off their land. Women and children move into prostitution, with

the military bases supplying constant customers. The community becomes dependent on this sex trade for money, and also poisoned by it culturally, so that when the bases close and are forced out by social movements, the community finds it difficult to survive the transition (Beacham). A tourist industry that advertises to US servicemen calling on them to "re-live the happy memory of Subic Bay" springs up. Women, rather than finding other work, are forced into the global sex trade and move to Thailand or other nations where there is still an active clientele.

These bases are a global problem. With each war the US engages in, they manage to leave US military bases behind. And all of them tell a similar story to Subic Bay. Cultural and military domination. They are always and necessarily paired. After the Gulf War, bases were set up in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Following the war in Somalia, bases were set up in Yemen. Following the war on Yugoslavia there were no less than 5 bases, in Hungary, Albania, Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo (Grossman).

The so-called War on Terror has opened up new avenues to establish these bases, and to extend the reach of US imperialism on a permanent basis through these installations.

This war, like any war, opens up new markets for the arms trade. This is a lucrative motive for any war. Here are some examples.

Canada is notorious for trading arms to Indonesia despite the well documented ongoing genocide in East Timor (COAT). The US did the same of course. Due to public outrage, arms trade with Indonesia was eventually outlawed in the US (Reilly, 4), although they always managed to find loopholes. Recently, thanks to the War on Terror, Bush convinced the US congress to allow "specialized training" of Indonesian military. Perhaps the School of the Americas will lend a hand in this training. And Indonesia has been promised economic and military aid "totalling more than \$700 million" (Reilly, 4) by

Bush. Certainly, with the bombing in Bali, this can only escalate, despite the fact that the Indonesian military is itself one of the world's most notorious terror organizations.

Other boons for the arms traders have included a lifting of the US embargo on arms sales to Pakistan. Bush convinced the US congress to lift the sanctions, and now the US is poised to sell weapons to BOTH sides in the India-Pakistan dispute (Wagner).

For the Philippines, there has been a dramatic increase from the year 2000 when there was \$1.4 million US in US financing of weapons purchases US military assistance. In the next few years, the Philippines may receive a total of 100\$ million US dollars in US financing of weapons purchases and US military assistance (Amnesty International, 2). Again, thanks to the war on terrorism.

At home, the expanding war means expansion of what is considered acceptable in our society.

Just this week we hear that our Minister of Immigration is proposing identity cards complete with thumb prints or retinal scans for Canadians travelling abroad(Curry). This is supposedly going to decrease US harassment of Canadians born in Muslim countries. This policy suggestion is based in the false but persistent assumption that by increasing surveillance of our citizens we increase their safety. It is expected by policy makers that fear of terrorism will increase our willingness to comply with such security measures.

For those of us who believe that US treatment of foreign born Canadians at their borders is strictly a problem of racism, photo id certainly seems laughable as a solution.

In Canada we have seen draconian anti-terror legislation. We have seen the Canadian embassy silent when Canadians of Muslim origin disappear into US custody only to re-emerge six month later having been held in solitary confinement, shackled, refused contact with lawyers or their family. We know this happened to one Canadian

doctor from Ontario, but we have no idea how many others are in US jails right now(cbc.ca).

We have seen the police using the rhetoric of the 'War on Terror' as an excuse to stockpile their own weapons. The Victoria police is a case in point with their recent media story about their exciting new weaponry (Stewart). I have no doubt that the police feel emboldened in their brutality at demonstrations like the occupation of Jeff Bray's office because of the War on terrorism.

Attacking poor people, attacking demonstrators, attacking Muslims. None of this is new in Canada. But the siege mentality, the dividing of people into "Us and Them" that comes with this (or any) war, encourages acceptance of this violence, just as it encourages acceptance of huge leaps in our own military budget while people are starving and homeless, while hospitals are closing.

And of course brutality by the military has been emboldened as well.

According to a report in *the Guardian* March 12, 2002 "The US has been secretly sending prisoners suspected of Al-Qaida connections to countries where torture during interrogation is legal "(Campbell). The article quotes a US diplomat as saying "After September 11, these sorts of movements have been occurring all the time. it allows us to get information from terrorists in a way we can't do on US soil"(Campbell).

So, we are even expected to accept torture. Of course, we know that torture by the US military isn't really a new thing. But the expectation that the military and government can discuss it publicly and have it be considered acceptable.

Propaganda is important for any war and this one is no different. As with past wars, the US military has recruited Hollywood to support its cause. They have held

meetings with Hollywood executives to push for supportive films. The Entertainment Industries Council even produced a briefing pamphlet called "Spotlight on a New Normal" which dealt with the portrayal of September 11 2001, terrorism and militarism in Hollywood films. I ordered a copy and when he sent it, Publication and Communications Coordinator David Michael Connor wrote to thank me for my interest and said "The handbook was developed in response to the September 11 attacks and is intended to help define the role Hollywood can play in the war on terrorism, I has generated interest from entertainment creators and professionals in the fields of health and social issues, as well as individuals interested in preparing themselves and their loved ones for terrorist attacks and other homeland security concerns"(Connor).

The guidelines written to show how to portray terrorism and the war with suggestions like "Promote preparedness for future vulnerabilities or attacks and consider story lines that promote volunteerism and flag displays in memory of terrorist victims"(EIC).

I don't know about you, but the Entertainment Industries Council would certainly be the first source I would seek out for information on terror attacks. And with advice like "display a flag prominently" how can we go wrong? Of course, the military takes briefings from Hollywood so seriously that they actually consulted screenwriters about "possible scenarios" for future terrorist attacks(Davidson). If anyone here has seen *Wag the Dog* this might seem eerily familiar. And the idea that the military PR would use Hollywood ideas to manufacture reality about the war is not so far fetched.

Recently, the US admitted setting up the Office of Strategic Influence recently as a PR agency for the War on Terrorism. Duties for the agency included spreading false news to foreign agencies. They admitted this publicly causing a flurry of publicity and a small public outcry (Rosen).

One has to ask, why admit publicly that the office was opened at all? Isn't the military normally intent on secrecy? One commentator, Ruth Rosen, suggests it was to increase public readiness for a war without end. I suspect it was more about building plausible denial. Opening then shutting the office implies that there is no longer such an office. When asked about public relations, they can say, "Oh, you're referring to the Office of Strategic Influence... that was closed down"

But was it closed down? And was it anything new? Officials refuse to answer questions about whether their head public relations staff, John Rendon of the Rendon Group, has been let go. He was hired immediately after Sept 11, and long before this office opened. And he worked with the military before—in Iraq

John Rendon himself, in a speech to the Olin Foundation and the US Air Force Academy said, "For example, if any of you either participated in the liberation of Kuwait City, five years ago this week, or if you watched it on television you would have seen hundreds of Kuwaitis waving small American flags.

Did you ever stop to wonder how the people of Kuwait City after being held hostage for seven long and painful months, were able to get hand held American flags, and for that matter the flags of other coalition countries? Well you now know the answer.

That was one of my jobs then"(Miller and Rampton)

So there is deliberate work to manufacture acceptance for militarism through pop culture. There is deliberate strategy to portray support for the US abroad, as well as to increase public perception of a threat.

If you know anything about US foreign policy at all, or even if you have just seen *Wag the Dog* this should be raising questions. Could advice from screenwriters be helping develop false press releases? Could Hollywood movies be helping establish public credibility for scenarios to be manufactured later by the military's own false media?

When we look at the War on Terrorism, its propaganda, its increase in policing of activists, its racial profiling, its pairing of anti-poverty activists and anti-globalization activists with terrorists, we can see what is really terrifying the powerful.

They are terrified that they will lose their power and their wealth. Terrified they won't be able to control women. Terrified that people will say no to the military and yes to housing, healthcare and an end to poverty. Terrified that the public will realize another possible world. Terrified we will struggle to reach it. Terrified that we will refuse to be afraid of their labels and their lies. That we will not be stopped by their threatened violence or their actual use of violence. In essence, they are afraid that we will win.

And they should be terrified. Because, like those union activists on Negros who had survived generations of colonization by the US with their pride, their will to struggle, and their love for their children, so will the people of the world survive the attempt to colonize our minds and our countries.

Thank you.

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