

## Prologue: the toll of empire

In modern war there is nothing sweet nor fitting in your dying. You will die like a dog for no good reason. *Ernest Hemingway, Notes on the Next War*

There is much common ground between low- and high-tech terrorism, between the terrorism of religious fanatics and that of market fanatics, that of the hopeless and that of the powerful, that of the psychopath on the loose and that of the cold-blooded uniformed professional. They all share the disrespect for human life. Eduardo Galeano, *The Theater of Good and Evil*

It is 6 a.m. in a small, impoverished town in the desert. Seventy-five US National Guard soldiers march through the streets chanting: 'Kill! Kill! Kill! Swing your guns from left to right, we can kill those guys all night.' An hour later they stop in front of the house of the local cleric opposed to the US occupation of Iraq, and at the urging of their commander, the soldiers shout again: 'Kill, kill, kill.'

This scene did not take place in Iraq, but in a town in north-eastern New Mexico in November 2003 where a National Guard unit was preparing to go to Iraq. When the soldiers stopped in front of the house of an anti-war priest, John Dear, he put on his winter coat and went out of the front door into the middle of the street. The soldiers stopped shouting and heard him implore: 'In the name of God, I order all of you to stop this nonsense, and not to go to Iraq. I want all of you to quit the military, disobey your orders to kill, and not to kill anyone ... God does not want you to kill so Bush and Cheney can get more oil. God does not support war' (Dear 2003).

This scene reveals just one of the costs of war, how it divides and exploits communities, even on the home front far from the

slaughter taking place abroad. The state of New Mexico, with the highest rate of poverty in the nation, is number one in military spending and first in nuclear weapons. It is the state most in need of disarmament and non-violence. It is the first place the Pentagon goes to recruit poor youth for the empire's army.

For these American soldiers, once they arrive in Iraq the enemy is everywhere. Specialist Corporal Michael Richardson, twenty-two, a combat veteran in Iraq, says: 'There was no dilemma when it came to shooting people who were not in uniform, I just pulled the trigger. It was up close and personal the whole time, there wasn't a big distance. If they were there, they were enemy.' Specialist Anthony Castillo adds: 'When there were civilians there we did the mission that had to be done. When they were there, they were at the wrong spot, so they were considered enemy.' The grim reality of the death they inflict is described by Sergeant First Class John Meadows: 'It's like snapshot photos of maggots on tongues, babies with their heads on the ground, men with their heads halfway off and their eyes wide open and mouths wide open ... The smells and the torsos burning ... nothing but burned bodies' (Graham 2003).

John Farrel, a theology student from Chicago who spent three weeks travelling around Iraq in the autumn of 2003 with Voices in the Wilderness (a non-profit organization that campaigns to 'end economic and military warfare against the Iraqi people'), states: 'You don't see US soldiers in Baghdad except an occasional well-guarded convoy of Humvees' (Farrel 2003). The Americans are lodged in Saddam's former palaces and barricaded inside a fortified enclave in central Baghdad. Outside these fortresses there is no American presence, except for well-armed patrols and counter-insurgency operations. John adds: 'There is sixty per cent unemployment, and the whole place has been made into a free trade zone. They've hired and fired the police three times and it's so dangerous they can't get anybody to do it' (ibid.).

It is an apt allegory for the American empire in the early twenty-first century. As the United States builds a Star Wars system to ensconce itself inside a fantasy missile shield, it turns the rest of the world into a free trade and free fire zone where the race to the bottom impoverishes the world's population and destroys the environment of the planet. 'It's all part of the corporate globalization,' says Eric Edgin, who also spent time in Baghdad with Voices in the Wilderness. 'We have to see and understand that Iraq is part of a bigger process' (Edgin 2003).

The Bush administration does not care how many civilians die in Iraq; in fact it connives with the established media to keep the US public ignorant of the true human toll of the war. In Baghdad, the Pentagon refuses to count the number of civilian dead. General Tommy Franks, the commander in chief of the US Central Command during the Iraq war, a man referred to as the 'proconsul' of a region extending from East Africa to Afghanistan, said, 'We don't do body counts.'

For the innocent, the toll of imperial warfare is staggering. The London-based Iraq Bodycount project has drawn on investigative and journalistic reports from Iraq to calculate that between eight and ten thousand civilians died in Iraq between March and December 2003 as a result of the conflict. According to the project: 'There is evidence that these deaths, often from indiscriminate use of firepower, increasingly fail to be reported or remain unacknowledged by occupation forces' (Iraq Bodycount 2003). This toll is roughly three times the number of people who died at the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. And it is inflicted on a country with less than one-tenth the population.

Jonathan Steele (2003) reported in the *Guardian* after the end of the official war: 'As far as Iraqis are concerned all the dead are "martyrs", whether they fell defending their country or were struck when missiles or cluster bombs hit their homes.' There are those who live and remember. It is a memory that grows exponentially

and creates a determination among the popular classes that the empire must not be allowed to continue.

This scenario is not limited to Iraq. Afghanistan, the Philippines and Colombia, among other countries, have suffered thousands of deaths as George W. Bush uses his 'war against terrorism' as a cover for extending the tentacles of the empire into the far corners of the globe. The cost is not only in terms of the loss of human life. According to the Iraq Bodycount project: 'People may suffer deep psychological trauma, miscarriage, bereavement, dislocation, and loss of home and property. Destruction of civil infrastructure can have effects which last for generations.'

In Afghanistan and Iraq, death and hardship will continue for years after the Americans depart. The thousands of cluster bombs dropped contain shrapnel-filled packages that often lie unexploded, waiting for a curious hand to detonate a deadly explosion. Depleted uranium from American munitions now pollutes the landscape of these countries, poisoning the people and the environment for generations to come.

In the United States the economic costs of America's imperial adventurism are becoming increasingly unbearable. The proposed military budget for 2004 is almost \$400 billion. That does not include the \$87.5 billion specially allocated for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the next six years the USA plans to spend \$2.7 trillion on the military. This is at a time when federal budget deficits are expected to approach \$500 billion a year. Economist Max Sawicky, who works at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, DC, says that the American economy 'is headed for a train wreck'.

Moreover, war contributes directly to the increasing polarization of income between the rich and poor in the United States. Bush's wars act as a form of double taxation, redistributing wealth upwards. First the taxpayers turn their money over to the Pentagon and the military contractors to carry out the destruction caused by

the war itself. Then they are taxed again as favoured companies such as Halliburton and Bechtel receive billions to rebuild the infrastructure that was destroyed by the war (Chomsky 2003).

All across America publicly funded programmes are being decimated by Bush's 'infinite war'. In Oregon, where the public education system has suffered severe cutbacks, school playgrounds are being sold for housing tracts to pay teachers' salaries. According to the National Priorities Project (2003), if the \$87.5 billion dollars earmarked for occupying Iraq and Afghanistan were 'spent on other priorities in the United States, it could pay for: 105,319 new affordable housing units, creating 257,820 new jobs; 418,060 new firefighters, health care coverage for 5,723,077; \$15.0 billion for school construction, resulting in 356,475 new jobs; and \$15.0 billion for local and state roads and bridges, creating 423,131 new jobs'.

While Americans suffer from the outrageous costs, it is not even clear that unilateral, pre-emptive preventive war is good for business. Throughout the international community, outrage against American policies has elicited dozens of boycotts against American products. One German bicycle manufacturer stopped buying \$300,000 of American supplies because of the Iraq war. 'Americans only pay attention when money is on the line,' the director of the company told Reuters (Kirschbaum 2003). The most vulnerable American products are the brands targeted by multiple boycotts around the globe. Coca-Cola, Budweiser, Marlboro, American whiskey and even American Express cards were taken off the menus in Europe after Washington politicians denigrated French products (ibid.).

On a broader economic plane *Business Week* ran an editorial the week the Iraq war officially began which stated,

As a foreign policy, [the Bush doctrine] is both arrogant – certain to generate opposition by even the most friendly of countries

– and corrosive, certain to undermine multilateral institutions and agreements, including those in the economic sphere ... Chief executives are beginning to worry that globalization may not be compatible with a foreign policy of unilateral preemption. Can capital, trade, and labor flow smoothly when the world's only superpower maintains such a confusing and threatening stance? US corporations may soon find it more difficult to function in a multilateral economic arena when their overseas business partners and governments perceive America to be acting outside the bounds of international law and institutions ... A world divided between multilateral economic and unilateral security policies is an uncertain and risky place. It is not likely to encourage economic growth or prosperity. The Administration risks turning what was once trumpeted as the American Century into the Anti-American Century. (Nussbaum 2003)

What seems particularly perverse is that Bush's war policy has a contingent domestic policy that targets immigrants with arbitrary arrests and unregulated detention in solitary holding cells that resemble animal cages. This barbaric treatment is imposed on people living in a nation that draws much of its strength from its diversity and its continual waves of immigrants. This onerous policy undermines the basis of our democratic experience and is a frontal assault on both our constitution and the ideals on which the country was founded. Suddenly Americans are living in a police state milieu where the government monitors everyday activities and crushes political dissent. This became particularly evident in Miami in November 2003 at the meetings for the Free Trade Area of the Americas. To 'provide security' for the hemispheric elites that attended the gatherings, the local police force received \$8.5 million out of the special \$87.5 billion war authorization bill. In fact the funds were used for repression. On the outskirts of the city the police stopped scores of buses carrying

demonstrators who wanted to participate in a protest with official permits. Then the police used tear gas, pepper spray and fired rubber bullets at random to disperse the 20,000 citizens who managed to participate in the protests.

The allure and immediacy of this war divert political attention from more pressing needs. They divert attention from a health-care system with skyrocketing costs that leaves many Americans without adequate medical treatment. They obscure the need to create sustainable production systems that will ensure the long-term existence of an environmentally sound planet. Finally they rob the creativity necessary to build an enlightened, forward-thinking America where the residents are intellectually alive and politically engaged.

For the planet as a whole, the biggest cost is the spread of the laissez-faire empire where money is power, people are landless commodities and the environment is ignored. In the following pages we look at the history of this empire, the money-based political drive that placed the Bush administration in power, the hubris of figures like George W., Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, and the costs and overstretch of their imperial policy, which is epitomized by their actions in Iraq. Finally we look at the hope embodied within a popular world democratic movement that is rising up against the American empire.