

Going Too Far

1.20.03

In Afghanistan now there are different kinds of US armed forces roving around searching for terrorists. They have very different kinds of governing ethics & tactics. There are Green Berets & Special Forces people who are driving Toyota pick-up trucks around in groups of a dozen, trying to win the confidence of villagers to get leads on where Taliban or Al Qaeda loyalists might be hiding. At the same time the 82nd Airborne & other regular attack troops have been dropped with great show of force into various suspicious village zones. There are reports from the Green Berets that the 82nd Airborne men have totally ruined their work of the last 6 months by ripping into homes and throwing people wildly around, threatening death & destruction. Afterward no one will speak openly to any Americans. A Special Forces officer is quoted as saying “*they destroyed everything we had done in one day, roughly interrogating the womenfolk, humiliating the men.*” Ironically, these are the same Green Berets that were the epitome of heavy-handed in Vietnam. They built a reputation as the most lethal of killers the armed forces could put in the field. “Winning hearts & minds” was a bitter, ironic joke in those days. Of course the “enemy” was arguably among the forces of Good in the world in 1964. Ho Chi Minh was a venerable poet & political thinker of the internationalist Left. He had written eloquently during his imprisonment by the French, & was strongly influenced by the works of Thomas Jefferson. So our soldiers & their officers had a harder time making headway trying to convince a villager (or themselves?) that the Viet Cong were Evil. But in Afghanistan, it is possible to imagine a squadron of Berets getting the feeling they were like superheroes on the side of Good. So, perhaps some have been patiently trying to understand the people they are amongst, perhaps they are listened to by villagers who have never had the illusion that the various Afghani & Arab warlords really cared about their welfare.

When I read that the Green Beret Captain said “it was all over, when they came into this village like that” I felt that everything was concentrated in that judgment. How many times in my life has that been the exact way to describe the history unfolding? Maybe there were Germans in the Hitler Youth who were in a pleasant aggressive delusion when they first occupied Poland or Sudetenland, that they were bringers of a higher civilization? Were there not some missionaries of the Reich who had no glimmer of what was really in the plans? And did they have such moments? When the newly formed SS units came roughly in to a Polish town throwing people down, interrogating the womenfolk violently, sometimes shooting up a house at a slight provocation? And did the Idealists in the political corps or the Army Regulars tell each other “this is ruining everything, now these people will hate us”?

They hadn't yet understood. You cannot convince a population to adore you if you are pillaging. You can't pretend when you conquer. Recent right-wing ideologues have been repeating an old saying that the Romans were more interested in cultivating Fear than affection. This goes along with the concept they float now of open Imperial rule.

Think of the places on earth where this has happened, that a brutality threshold has been crossed which exterminated a gentle-souled culture, if not the entire population itself. In the 1300s the Albigensian & other utopian “heresies” were crushed in massacre after massacre. The army of Phillip asked a Papal Legate what should he do with the people of the town that had just surrendered after a siege? What should he do with those taking refuge in the Catholic cathedral? How would he know which were the heretics? “Kill them all” said the Legate, “let God sort them out”

Then there is Ceylon, a generation ago one of the sweetest places to visit on Earth. Or

Cambodia in the 1960s, until the horrific bombings and massacres....Indonesia before 1965, before the half-million slaughtered in a week.

2

Mass murder does not seep away in ten years. The stain makes ghouls of its perpetrators & they infect the world with their cover-ups and flashbacks. Everyone in Angola is a damaged soul after the viciousness of the civil war, it will take generations to get the feeling back, the feeling of beautiful living. All those feelings for which the medium is tranquility. What will it take before the people of Rwanda will be renowned for their lovesongs?

If the government of pirates in Washington succeeds in their war of conquest over Iraq, will they not cross a similar Rubicon? To occupy Baghdad & Basra & arrest or kill the President & his ministers, won't there be many such rivers to cross? homes demolished? villagers shot in a ditch? terrible bombings? When those Special Forces men are going door-to-door down streets where snipers are picking them off...will they take the time to have tea with the elders?

It's possible that they want us all to see this. That they know full well the only way they will win this swiftly is by dint of brutal terrifying force, and they want the people of Syria & Iran & Egypt & Arabia to see it on TV? Just as they wanted the assassination of Senator Wellstone to be imprinted on the citizenry of the 'homeland'. Every Imperial force has had to make "examples" of towns or tribes at some crucial point. A tactical nuclear device might do the trick in Iraq.

It is this intuitive dread that is fueling the opposition all over the world, particularly in Europe where the true consequences of Imperial Warmaking are vividly known and studied. We know that once they send battalions onto Iraqi territory "it's all over". They will be unable to patch up the lesions in our national soul, they will never be anything but hated conquerors in the entire Mid-East, they will have to take the Gloves off. It will plunge the World into a Dark Age of religious & fratricidal massacres during which the delicacies of learning & science & art & love & the worship of Mother Nature will ebb dramatically amongst all the major peoples. Warlord philosophy will prevail & the worst amongst us will be at all the centers of power grabbing for wealth & cutting one another's throats. This is already the condition for peoples living in many places across the Southern Hemisphere & within the giant cities of the industrial world. The new War would vault the sub rosa condition into dominance. King of the Mountain will be the only template of the new world's history.

It is clear that the religious extremists in the the major religions are heated to explosive lunacy in their hatreds of rivals and their call for the faithful to bring about the end of Days. Once this war is launched, with the powerful assist from the Christian Right, all these fires will leap up in magnitude. There are large numbers of militant believers who will see the prophecies of a final conflict taking shape between Islam & Christianity & Judaism, or between Islam & Hinduism. How far will it go? It is not an experiment ever attempted on this scale or in this historical framework. Therefore it will utterly change the framework ipso facto. And what is this life they will make for us in the new century they are aching for? It's the End of Days all right. Ten generations of misery & catastrophic events. And another ten to heal the wounds. It's not clear to me that the species will survive such a period. At a certain level of degradation, we may become merely a reliable source of carrion. The Vulture Gods will rule from on high & the maggots from below.

It is not something one wants on the pages of one's family tree, that one pretended it wasn't happening when there was still a slender chance of staving off the War. If the Dark Times pass & the histories are patched back together, how shall we be accounted? As accomplices? As people too distracted by entertainment & work & swill? As apologists who deplored the barbarity of the 'barbarians'? It is these future souls that bid the loudest that we do something now to avert this