

Bombing our way to hell

THANKSGIVING is usually time for my annual rant against our seasonal dive into the abyss of hedonistic consumerism. Friday is my favorite holiday – Buy Nothing Day! I usually write a story or two and do a few radio interviews about fetishistic consumption, obsessive compulsive shopping and apocalyptic materialism in the face of environmental holocaust, national and personal economic ruin, and most annoying of all – boring consumption-oriented conversation. And I try to make a joke or two – maybe about the annual slaughter of Christmas trees.

But not this year. This isn't time for business or business disruption-as-usual. This is shaping up to be a particularly bloody holiday season - and the blood is on our collective hands.

Before I get into the carnage, however, I want to describe a sort of "Supersize Me" experiment I did last week - modeled after the documentary film where film maker Morgan Spurlock went on a month-long exclusive McDonald's binge to see what the health impact would be (he got fat and sick). In the same vein, I went on a five-day all-American media diet. Based out of a Chicago hotel room, I eschewed all alternative and foreign media. And like the majority of Americans, I stayed away from newspapers as well. Instead I turned to CNN, Fox, ABC, NBC and CBS for all of my news.

After five days I was an expert on the mundane. I could ace any quiz about Cameron Diaz, Justin Timberlake and their paparazzi punch out session. And I could provide the

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most excruciatingly trivial details about the Scott Peterson trial's sentencing phase. Iraq, however, was a bit of a blur. Going by what Big Brother said, we seem to have characteristically kicked some ass in Fallujah, with a bunch of "precision strikes" killing only the "bad guys." The city was "pacified" easier than expected and was at peace - more or less waiting for Baskin and Robbins to open shop. Oh happy day.

The ribbons didn't help

Upon returning home to Buffalo, I quickly set upon the task of catching up on the news. It seems things didn't go at all well in Fallujah. Over 30 Americans died and over 400 American troops were wounded and airlifted away - the yellow ribbons on our bumpers didn't seem to help them much. And at least 1,200 Iraqis were killed.

A Red Cross official in Baghdad reports that at least 800 civilians were killed and about 50,000 residents are still, at press time, trapped in Fallujah - a city roughly the same size as Buffalo. The same Red Cross official reported that American forces used cluster bombs and a "phosphorous weapon" inside the city, which is now suffering from an outbreak of cholera.

The TV reporters told me that the Fallujah operation would set the tempo for Iraq by pacifying the resistance and affirming Iraqi government control (they seem to be under the impression that Iraq has a government) over that nation as it moved into its national election. They must have been smoking crack.

It turns out that terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, along with up to 80% of his fighters, slipped out of town, leaving the Fallujans to catch the brunt of the American assault. If our purpose for leveling this city of 300,000 people was to capture al-Zarqawi, then we fucked up royally.

Fifteen cities down

Ditto on the plan to stabilize Iraq before the elections. As Fallujah ignited, so did the rest of Iraq, with approximately 15 cities, according to Inter Press Service (IPS) news reports, falling to resistance control. In Mosul, Iraq's third largest city, insurgents are openly patrolling the streets brandishing Kalashnikov automatic rifles and rocket propelled grenade launchers. Looters stripped the city's now-abandoned American military base.

Iraqi political analyst Dafer al-Ani, speaking to IPS, said it's not the aim of the Iraqi resistance "to keep controlling the cities. They're just making the enemy lose as much as possible and then pulling out to go to other cities." As this cycle of the resistance "liberating" cities, with the Americans following on cue and destroying the "liberated" cities, continues, the war for the hearts and minds of the Arab world becomes irrevocably

lost with America sinking into a moral quagmire.

The Telegraph [of London] reports that the International Committee for the Red Cross has strongly condemned the "utter contempt for humanity" demonstrated by all sides in the Iraq War. Put simply, with the attack on Fallujah, mandate man Bush went over the edge in his psychotic little war. The U.S. Based Institute for Public Accuracy cites a number of legal scholars who describe the attack on this civilian population center as a clear-cut war crime. Thomas Jefferson School of Law Professor Marjorie Cohn cites the pre-invasion bombing of Fallujah's Nazzal Emergency Hospital and the storming of Fallujah General Hospital, along with the U.S. refusal to allow doctors to "go inside the main part of the city and help the wounded," to be "in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions."

Canada's York University Law Professor Michael Mandel, writes, "The full-scale assault on a major population center like Fallujah, coming more than a year and a half into the war, only proves its madness and criminality." He argues, "If the Nuremberg Tribunal were reconstituted tomorrow, the president and his whole cabinet would stand charged."

When terror is terrorism

To understand the attack on Fallujah, and the whole Bush global military strategy for that matter, we need to look at the concept of terrorism. M.I.T. Linguistics Professor and political theorist Noam Chomsky cites the official definition of terrorism as articulated in U.S. code and Army manuals. It's "The calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious or ideological in nature. through intimidation, coercion or instilling fear." Terrorism is only defined as terrorism, however, Chomsky writes, when it is conducted against us, "whoever we happen to be." Hence, he goes on, "we can draw the standard conclusions that you read all the time: namely, that we and our allies are the main victims of terrorism." When we conduct terrorism against others, Chomsky argues, it's semantically masked as "low intensity conflict," "counter-terror" or "counterinsurgency."

Last month, the New York Times (Oct 12) quoted one high ranking Pentagon official justifying U.S. aerial bombing of Iraqi population centers, saying "If there are civilians dying in connection with these attacks, and with the destruction, the locals at some point have to make a decision . . . Do they want to harbor the insurgents and suffer the consequences that come with that, or do they want to get rid of the insurgents and have the benefit of not having them there?" The official went on to claim that the strategy was working, explaining that the U.S. is beginning "to see Fallujan leaders come out and say: 'O.K. No mas! What do we do about this? How do we work with you, Prime Minister Allawi, to try to stop this kind of warfare.' That's beginning to show some success."

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Make no mistake about it. This is clear cold calculated terrorism by any definition. And it's state terrorism. The Bush administration is now carrying out such terrorism on a daily basis in Iraq. And they're doing it on a horrific scale. It's designed not just to terrorize the Iraqis into submission, but to stand as a warning to Iran, Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba and any other nation that gets in the way of the Bush administration's imperial designs.

No Mas this X-Mas

And it's no accident that the Pentagon official quoted in The Times broke into a Spanish "no mas." Such terrorism has been the official U.S. policy in Latin America for a century and a half, with the Reagan administration bringing it to a bloody zenith in Central America in the 1980s during the Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz-Cheney gang's last romp in the White House. Such a policy is a violation of Article 51 of the Geneva Convention, which clearly forbids "Acts or threats of violence, the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among civilian populations." Perhaps this is why the Bush administration is now arguing that the Geneva Conventions no longer apply to the U.S. - because we're terrorists. We're the rouge state that's above the law. Fuck the World!

George W. Bush thinks his slim election win gives him a mandate for war. He argues that he now has "Pol-it-ical Cap-it-al." He launched his war on Fallujah just days after the election - while votes were still being counted. I don't care if he won by a ten to one margin. That still wouldn't give him or us the right to drop bombs on hospitals, to deny wounded people medical treatment, to gun down civilian families trying to flee war zones, to execute unarmed people at will, to desecrate houses of worship, to threaten wholesale slaughter and then deliver it at will. It's illegal, mandate or not - and in this case there clearly was no mandate for the terrorism we're now seeing.

Please remember what Christmas is supposed to be all about. Let's make some noise this holiday season.