

antiwar demonstrators—supposedly to “blunt potential violence by extremist elements,” according to a Reuters interview with a federal law enforcement official. Given the FBI’s expansive definition of “potential violence” in the past, this is a net that could catch almost any group or individual who falls into official disfavor.

The FBI is also urging local police to report suspicious activity by protesters to the Joint Terrorism Task Force, which is run by the FBI. If local police take the hint and start pouring in the dirt, the JTTF could soon be building a “Total Information Awareness”-lite database on those antiwar groups and activists.

If the FBI publicly admits that it is surveilling antiwar groups and urging local police to send in information on protesters, how far might the feds go? It took over a decade after the first big antiwar protests in the 1960s before the American people learned the extent of FBI efforts to suppress and subvert public opposition to the Vietnam War. Is the FBI now considering a similar order to field offices as the one it sent in 1968, telling them to gather information illustrating the “scurrilous and depraved nature of many of the characters, activities habits, and living conditions representative of New Left adherents”—but this time focused on those who oppose Bush’s Brave New World?

Is the administration seeking to stifle domestic criticism? Absolutely. Is it carrying out a war on dissent? Probably not—yet. But the trend lines in federal attacks on freedom of speech should raise grave concerns to anyone worried about the First Amendment or about how a future liberal Democratic president such as Hillary Clinton might exploit the precedents that Bush is setting. ■

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Blowback

Imperialism corrupts the occupier.

By Eric S. Margolis

“I thought we should act as their protector ... not to try to get them under our heel. ... But now ... we have got into a war, a quagmire from which each fresh step renders the difficulty of extraction immensely greater.”

These words were not written by a critic of President George W. Bush’s grand misadventure in Iraq but by Mark Twain, who was outraged by America’s occupation and bloody “pacification” of the Philippines from 1900 to 1910. Yet Twain’s prescient words are as apropos today as they were a century ago.

If there is one lesson the 19th and 20th centuries teach, it is that colonial ventures are ultimately unsuccessful and often corrupt the nations and armies that wage them. Unfortunately, in President Bush’s “bring ‘em on” White House, history, that doleful testament of mankind’s past follies, is considered irrelevant.

So America unfortunately seems destined to repeat the errors and brutalities of previous imperial powers, including its own forgotten colonial adventures in the Western Hemisphere and Asia.

The Bush administration keeps disguising the true nature of the occupation of Iraq: first we were fighting an urgent preventive war to save the U.S.; then rebranding it a liberation; human-rights intervention; humanitarian rebuilding; war against Islamic terrorists; and, most recently, altruistic mission to implant democracy in the Middle East.

The rest of world, however, recognizes the Iraq invasion and occupation for what it is: a return to imperialism. In

Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Russia, Holland, Portugal, and Japan, memories of their past colonial eras are still vivid and painful. They see a naïve, unlettered Bush administration rushing into places where old colonial powers no longer dare or care to tread.

Americans have simply forgotten what colonial wars are like. After seizing the Philippines from Spain, U.S. forces waged a bloody, 10-year war against independence-minded Muslims of the south known as Moros, in which over 100,000 civilians (some sources say 500,000) died, something rarely taught in American schools. Interestingly, the Bush White House has dispatched U.S. Special Forces to fight latter-day Moros, Islamic separatists and bandits in Mindanao, whom the U.S. mistakenly brands Islamic terrorists.

France’s 132-year rule over Algeria produced one of the ugliest guerilla wars of the 20th century, in which French colonial troops killed between 600,000 and one million Arabs. After Paris gave its generals *carte blanche* to break the FLN (Algerian resistance), the French Army unleashed a ferocious campaign of mass murders, collective punishments, assassinations, and tortures—crimes that still shake France to this day.

In my idealistic student days, I served as a European courier for the FLN and organized pro-Algerian demonstrations. La Main Rouge, a secret terror group created by French intelligence, murdered scores of people who aided the Algerian cause and repeatedly threat-

ened my life. A former French army general, Paul Aussaresses, recently created an uproar by boasting he had murdered senior FLN leaders and routinely tortured suspects—often to death—to break rebel networks during the famous Battle of Algiers.

By the end of the Algerian war, the French army had covered itself with shame and dishonor. As one paratroop general famously remarked, “We committed worse crimes than the Gestapo and S.S.” It took a decade after Algeria for the morale of the French Army to be restored.

Most colonial wars share common elements. The imperial power always discovers that it lacks sufficient troops to police the new colony and must employ local mercenary forces, as the U.S. now does in Afghanistan. Imperial Britain and France were masters at raising native regiments: Britain had its Indian sepoy, Sikhs, and Gurkhas; France its dashing Sphais and tough Moroccan infantry.

WELL-DISCIPLINED TROOPS **DETERIORATED UNDER PRESSURE.**

Imperial powers often attempt to dragoon or bribe vassal states into sending troops to aid the “pacification.” German and Canadian units in Afghanistan are an example of the former; rent-an-army Polish, Romanian, and Ukrainian units sent to Iraq, the latter. The Persian Emperor Xerxes did the same when he convoked his vassal kings for the invasion of Greece.

Imperialists invariably find rebellious tribes, repressed religions, or restive regions ready to rise up against the central government and join the colonial forces. Civilian administration and colonial armies are usually filled by minorities, likes Hindus in Sri Lanka, Maronites in Lebanon, Sikhs in India, or Sunnis in Iraq.

At first, resistance to invasion is spo-

radic and scattered. But, in time, many resistance groups become more combat effective. Imperial troops initially retain strict discipline. But after suffering growing numbers of attacks and mounting losses from a faceless foe hidden among civilians, they inevitably vent fear and frustration on captives, individual civilians, then on entire villages. Such brutality naturally sparks more local resistance, which continues the cycle of rising violence, bringing more repression by imperial forces, and so on.

This writer saw in the Indian-ruled portion of disputed Kashmir how the Indian Army’s generally well-disciplined troops gradually deteriorated—under pressure of ambushes, mined roads, and sniping—into thugs who burned villages, gang-raped women, conducted mass killings, tortured suspects, and brutalized Muslim civilians, whom they had grown to hate.

The same holds true of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza, the

archetype of America’s mess in Iraq. This writer accompanied Israeli troops when they first invaded Lebanon in 1982 and, as a former soldier, was impressed by their discipline and restraint. But after a few months of occupation duty in dangerous south Lebanon and the occupied territories, the world’s most intelligent, best-educated soldiers began to become brutalized by constant pinprick attacks and ever-present tension, shooting down women and children and razing homes with ever decreasing compunction.

Israeli officers have repeatedly warned their government that the armed forces are being corrupted by occupation duty and have turned a sword into a club. A small number of courageous

Israeli soldiers and aviators have risked prison by refusing to serve in the occupied territories.

The Dutch, among the world’s most civilized people, never tire of recounting their nation’s suffering under Nazi occupation, yet rarely mention their own ruthless East Indies colonial wars from 1815-1942. In the sultanate of Aceh alone, in the 1870s, Dutch soldiers and Christian mercenary troops from Ambon slaughtered 60,000 Muslim Acehnese and sent large numbers into forced labor. The Dutch East Indian Army became notorious for cruelty and brutality.

Even British imperial rule, which Americans know only through the rose-tinted lens of old Hollywood epics, could be savage. During the great Sepoy uprising of 1857, rebelling Indians were tied by the British to the mouths of cannon and blown apart or hanged *en masse* along main roads. Chinese were slaughtered in great numbers by British troops or forced into opium addiction.

Japan’s Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (the 1940s one, not today’s) also began benignly, with the Japanese invasion forces describing themselves as “liberators” of Asian peoples from European colonialism—which, in truth, they were. But the callousness of the Japanese Imperial Army in China and the Philippines, its arrogance and lack of understanding of local ways, quickly turned the “liberators” into hated oppressors and targets of attack.

Russia’s record as a colonial occupier in Chechnya is also a warning to Americans in Iraq. The wars in Chechnya turned into a nightmare of atrocities: torture, mass killings, bombings, murder, rape, banditry, and looting. Russia’s demoralized soldiers in Chechnya resort to heavy drinking, drugs, and routinely brutalize civilians. Russian losses in the Caucasus are now approaching 10,000 dead, 66 percent of officially stated

losses in the Afghanistan debacle.

What these and other colonial wars teach is that the finest, best-disciplined armies soon become corrupted by police duties and anti-guerilla operations. Lack of strategic and political purpose will quickly destroy an occupying army's morale, as happened to U.S. forces in Vietnam.

American soldiers in Iraq are already showing the same disturbing signs of colonial malaise. They have become trigger-happy and increasingly shoot innocent civilians. Iraqis are being treated like a dangerous, conquered people rather than "liberated" allies. Increasingly brutal roundups and reprisals seem likely to follow.

Unless Washington gets other unwilling nations to help police its new colony or hands Iraq to the UN, half the U.S. Army will be forced to stay in Iraq and fight a low-grade, but extremely expensive, guerilla war. The longer U.S. forces stay, the more they will be resented and opposed by Iraqis.

So far, major resistance is only coming from the Sunni minority. But once majority Shi'ites are convinced Saddam Hussein will not return to power, it will be only a matter of time before they also turn violently against Iraq's American rulers.

America was born through a war waged against colonialism. The last thing its armed forces should be doing is enforcing colonial rule on other nations. The old-world image of the United States—decency and law, titanic energy, liberty, and respect for human rights—is fast being replaced by the ugly icon of heavily armed U.S. troops kicking down the doors of Iraqi homes. We seem fated to repeat history's mistakes. ■

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Prisoners Dilemma

Detainees held at Guantanamo pose a challenge to international law.

By Daniel McCarthy

MEALS ARE PREPARED to strict Islamic standards; signs point the faithful toward Mecca; doctors attend to physical pains, Muslim chaplains to less obvious hurts. But these people who want for little lack something essentially human: a place in the world. For most of the 660 held at Guantanamo Bay, their own countries don't claim them, and this country doesn't know what to do with them. Irregular soldiers in a conflict without boundaries or end, we designate them "enemy combatants" rather than prisoners of war, but that only complicates the legal limbo. They may be among the deadliest enemies the United States faces in the War on Terror, international recruits to al-Qaeda trained and determined to carry out attacks against Americans. Loosing them in unstable Afghanistan is no remedy. But neither is holding them indefinitely without charge—though internment at Guantanamo might be the least they deserve. We just don't know. And we haven't been in any hurry to find out.

None of the detainees has been convicted as a terrorist, either before a military tribunal or a civilian court. For almost two years they have been held at the discretion of the executive branch, with no opportunity for a hearing—and critics say these detentions may seriously undermine the rule of law by violating everything from the Constitution to the Geneva Conventions to human rights in general.

Yet the Bush administration insists that it is acting within the law by holding the detainees without trial. In November, however, the Supreme Court agreed to hear an appeal in the case of *Rasul v. Bush*, a petition for *habeas corpus* filed on behalf of several of the detainees. If the Court rules in favor of the petitioners, it may ultimately force the administration to change the way it fights the War on Terror.

Part of the reason for holding the detainees at Guantanamo Bay is to prevent them from re-joining the fight in Afghanistan, where most were captured. But Camp Delta, where all but a handful are held, is not a POW camp. It is an interrogation camp: the larger reason for keeping hundreds detained in Guantanamo is to learn everything they know about al-Qaeda and the possible whereabouts of Osama bin Laden or Taliban-leader Mullah Omar.

Some suggest that denying legal counsel to the prisoners plays an important part in the interrogation; they are more readily induced to co-operate while their futures remain uncertain. (None of the detainees knows of the petitions that have been filed on their behalf in federal court.) This ambiguity seems to be having an effect: the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has access to the detainees, claims that many of them have suffered a marked mental deterioration as a result of not knowing how long they will