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CHE-LEILA

Magazine of Che-Leila



resistance or terrorism?

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EDITORIAL

Consistent anti-imperialist understanding and struggle

Che-Leila seeks to bring to light some of the issues that are not dealt with sufficiently in the anti-war and progressive movement in the 'West'. Moreover one can say that there is a lot of arrogance and chauvinism displayed by the Western left in general, not only against the oppressed peoples in the 'Third World', but also within these countries against oppressed and working class communities. Che-Leila doesn't have a 'party line', but is committed to open and honest debate. From this Che-Leila encourages people to involve themselves in practical real life struggles to further the interests of the oppressed and working classes both in their country of activity and internationally.

World anti-imperialist movements on the move

The anti-imperialist nationalist and socialist movements of Asia are edging forward, such as those in Nepal and the Philippines. The alliance of left-Nationalist, Arab Nationalist and Islamic forces is growing in the Arab world, making Bush-the-father's 'New World Order' (in opening reference to the 1991 aggression against Iraq) a rather ironic statement.

Latin America shifts to the left

There have also been major developments in Latin America in the interests of the majority of the continent's destitute and oppressed. All across Latin America mass socialist movements are developing from the grassroots up to winning local, regional and national positions in administration. Latin America is clearly showing the world the strategy and tactics, organization and ideology necessary for long-term successful struggle against for national and social liberation. This is not so surprising considering that what we are now witnessing in the region is the fifth or sixth wave of mass revolutionary struggles. Following the Native American resistance to colonialism, there took place the struggle of the Bolivarian type (pan-Latin American popular nationalist movement), then the first nationalist struggles of the twentieth century, followed by at least another two waves of increasingly sophisticated struggle, led on all fronts by socialists and communists. The regional and international legacy of socialism and communism has never faded in the hearts, minds and organisations of the Latin American masses, this is typified by the profound influence that socialist Cuba, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara continue to have on the struggles there.

Hugo Chavez, exemplary leader of a new revolutionary generation

The anti-imperialist World Festival of Youth and Students right now in Caracas, Venezuela will be an inspirational coming together of all the progressive forces of the region and beyond. We hope that the *Che-Leila* contingent at the festival is successful in developing friendship with progressive forces there. President Hugo Chavez, and the Bolivarian revolution he is forging, are rightly adopted as a great example for the oppressed throughout Latin America. It is an inspiration to have someone who has all the qualities of a mass revolutionary leader forging a nation out of dependence from US Imperialism and using the labour, intellect and natural wealth of the land and people to the benefit of the majority. Chavez is an example to many around the world of the quality of leadership necessary for revolutionary struggle.

Poverty of knowledge about the Arab and Islamic struggles

There is wider understanding of the political development in Latin America amongst the Western left as compared to that towards the Arab and Islamic movements. This is probably due to the long-standing solidarity activities with Latin American socialist movements there for decades. There is much more confusion and prejudice on developments that have taken place in the Arab and Islamic world in the last century or so. The Arab world was one of the last places in the world to be colonized in the world and its culture is much more vilified than that of Latin America which is a lot closer to the popular culture of West Europe

and north America. We hope that the interviews with Dyab Abu Jahjah of the Arab European League, and Ethiopian Marxist intellectual Mohamed Hassan, will contribute to the discussion that needs to take place to attain a clearer picture about these movements. As can be seen the interviews are not uniform in their views, but there always needs to be a critical wide ranging debate to get clearer ideas so as to develop the struggle for liberation. Due to the fact that there is such poverty of knowledge and debate on the Arab and Islamic struggles, *Che-Leila* magazine has devoted a considerable amount of space to this subject.

"China, friend of all enemy of none"

The role of the Peoples' Republic of China is another subject that is seldom debated in the Western left. Although this is partly due to ideological differences with the Chinese leadership, it often seems that the Western left just doesn't like brown and black leaders of the masses in oppressed nations. The Western left tend to adopt positions more akin to their own ruling class albeit with radical and left sounding rhetoric. On so many issues one finds that the bourgeoisie is taking the lead in analysis and education as to the developments of the world and, from their own imperialist point of view, what this means for their strategic interests in the world. The bourgeois thinkers are probably more honest than the left because they, unlike the left, have serious and deadly business to take care of such as neo-colonial oppression and domination of the peoples and countries of the world. The left generally don't have a serious movement of any kind to be concerned with so there is nothing serious to be said or done.

As the China article and the introduction to it makes clear, Peoples' China cannot be ignored. China is the pole of attraction for those movements and nations that are asserting their independence against the US in particular. Things are further muddled in the minds of many people by the economic methods the Chinese Communist Party has adopted to advance its socialist aims. What is admitted by all is that these market reforms for a developing country led by a socialist state have succeeded in attaining levels of development for hundreds of millions of people that has never been seen on such a scale before in the history of humanity.

US in terminal decline and crisis, new wars on the agenda

All these developments are taking place within the context of growing military aggression by imperialism led by the US and UK. Although the 'New World Order' is looking a lot shakier due to countries and movements increasingly asserting their confidence, the gangs running US and UK Imperialism understand that their only way of maintaining their precarious economic domination of the world is by naked military blackmail and punishment, or, in their language, 'shock and awe' and 'full spectrum dominance'. All indications point to a growing economic crisis, the decline of the US as number one world super power and the growth of the Chinese Communist Party led bloc of countries asserting their independence. The US will not go down without all its military capability blitzing the rest of the world as it has started to do; the months and years of late that have passed have shown how more intense their crisis and military actions have become.

'Bringing the war home'

Inevitably the crisis is going to be brought home to the imperialist lands. Complete economic meltdown and crash, and all the chaos that will bring has not yet come about, although it will. Al-Qaeda, or the armed terrorist movements inspired by the leadership of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have made sure the imperialist mainlands have not remained immune to anger inspired by the gargantuan blitzing that the US and UK have been committing across the Islamic and Arab world. The attacks in New York, Madrid and now in London have brought the war these countries have been overtly conducting in several countries and countless others indirectly, home to the West. These attacks, brutal and

unjust as they are to those who are the victims of them, were inevitable due to Britain's aggression against Iraq since 1991, as well as against Afghanistan and continued support of occupation of Palestine by Israel. One could even argue that these attacks were made possible by the failure of mass anti-war protest to stop state aggression and the anti-war movements failure to engage in more effective strategies in order to stop or hinder the war. Deep going questions need to be asked amongst the anti-war movement in the West, especially in the USA, UK and Italy, such as those asked by former *New Statesmen* editor Peter Wilby in *The Guardian* of August 5th:

"Responsibility" is a better word than "blame". We demand it, rightly, of those who carry out the atrocities; we should demand it also of ourselves and our rulers. The bombers, or rather those who control and influence them, are clear they are at war. President Bush seemed to agree when he declared a "war on terror". Is our role in this war a just one? Do we want to continue the war? If not, what will we do to stop it? Those are the questions we need to ask ourselves."

British society - two hostile camps

British society is polarising into two hostile camps. The oppressed Muslim community, alienated from society because of the massacres against Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq, and under racist oppression in Britain itself. The white working class, without a socialist mass party to represent working class interests are increasingly attracted to far-right policies and parties as a result of their declining living standards and the perceived, and to some extents *actual*, hostility of the Muslim population. Both camps are overwhelmingly working class, and are without an organisation that represents their interests, which are ultimately the same; a society based on respecting other nations, respecting the religious and ethnic communities in Britain, and committed to a just social order with an end to drugs and drug dealers, safe crime-free communities, decent affordable housing, community

control of the police, decent jobs, and universal free healthcare.

There is no real indication yet of a movement able to unite these two sections of the working class. However, societies in history have been in worse situations compared to ours, and have nevertheless produced a mass revolutionary movement. The best people can do is involve themselves in forging such a movement however grim the reality and difficult these tasks are.

British ruling class oppression at home and abroad The tasks facing the masses

Britain's political system and ruling class, and their political servants (the Labour Party led by Prime Minister Tony Blair) are primarily responsible for this state of affairs. Being what they are - capitalists and imperialists; one could argue that you couldn't expect anything different. Britain is keeping on course with the US in foreign wars and is turning Britain into a society whereby any protest against the government line is criminalized. Armed police are now commonplace, the policy of 'shoot-to-kill' by the police is on the streets of Britain (we should "expect more" of it according to Met Police Commissioner), and reported racist attacks have risen by over 600%. All of this must be opposed. The progressive and anti-war movements have to take these challenges up seriously, and if they don't, others must. These developments not only have to be opposed but also eventually reversed. This requires a committed militant grassroots organisation of the British peoples. This is what we haven't got and this is what is urgently needed.

One can only hope that as the situation deteriorates, as it obviously is doing, more and more people will be more receptive and willing to take up these challenges.

The views expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect those of the editor.

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COVER ILLUSTRATION ADAPTED FROM OSPAAAL PALESTINE SOLIDARITY POSTER BY GLADYS ACOSTA, 1975

IRA LEADS THE WAY

MUHAMMED S. AZAD

The latest statement by the IRA is a result of the strategy of the Republican Movement to achieve a just peace in Ireland on the basis of National Liberation. The victory of this struggle opens up the path to a truly Irish mass socialist and anti-imperialist movement which they have arguably been developing since the start of modern Sinn Fein in the late 1960s as an *integral part* of the National Liberation movement.

Modern Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army can be traced back to the armed self-defence of the Irish Nationalist community in the 1960's. This was a time the Nationalist people were building a mass civil rights movement to win basic democratic rights. In this struggle they faced the violence of the Loyalists militias and gangs and also directly by the British military occupation, oppression, mass imprisonment, murder and even massacres, as in the case of the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1972, whereby the British army killed 13 unarmed protestors. The *Unionists* or *Loyalists* in northern Ireland have generally played the role of British colonialism settlers in Ireland; this is changing thanks to the community level work, the peace process and Good Friday Agreement between them and the Nationalist or Republican community.

As long as the British refused to negotiate a planned withdrawal from Ireland through, and brutally militarily occupied the Irish Nationalist people of northern Ireland, they were only going to meet armed and popular resistance. This was the case throughout much of the 1970's, '80's and early 1990's.

The membership and leadership of Sinn Fein and the IRA has come from and remains overwhelmingly working class. When many Irish National Liberation fighters of Sinn Fein and the IRA were sent to prison as well as large sections of the Nationalist population, in one part of Belfast, one out of three youths were put inside. They used this time to reflect and study how to further the aims of their struggle, and also closely studied and learnt from international examples of successful national liberation and socialist struggles.

A strategy started to emerge that aimed towards mobilising wider and wider sections of the population for the struggle, and that it was clear that the masses would not support a long drawn out war with the British although the IRA were ready for that. A large part of the struggle was

on the military level but the movement moved increasingly towards mass militant politics and reaching out to all political forces to achieve a negotiated settlement based on justice and equality.

The Irish freedom fighters that went on hunger strikes in 1981 demanding political status in the prison resulted in this strategy mushrooming throughout the Nationalist struggle. Bobby Sands who became a MP while on hunger strike in the *Long Kesh* or *Maze* prison stated famously that everyone has a part to play in the struggle. This brought a whole new wave of mass support into the Republican Movement and Sinn Fein in particular and resulted in them going deeper into the communities and representing Nationalist working class families. They worked on *all* the issues that affected their communities on the basis of concrete socialist strategies and doing things like opening up advice and social centres where the community came to discuss and organise in the interests of their rights; ranging from social and economic rights to defending those who were abused and treated unjustly by the British occupation. Now Sinn Fein are the second biggest party in northern Ireland, so successful has their work been.

This strategy of empowering their communities was also important in mobilising the masses for struggle in the south of Ireland. There was no British occupation there, so Sinn Fein prioritised the issues that people were facing which had to be worked on. Therefore Sinn Fein developed community and other social struggles. This has been a very successful strategy and they have grown to become the third biggest party in the South. They are also the *only* all-Ireland political party.

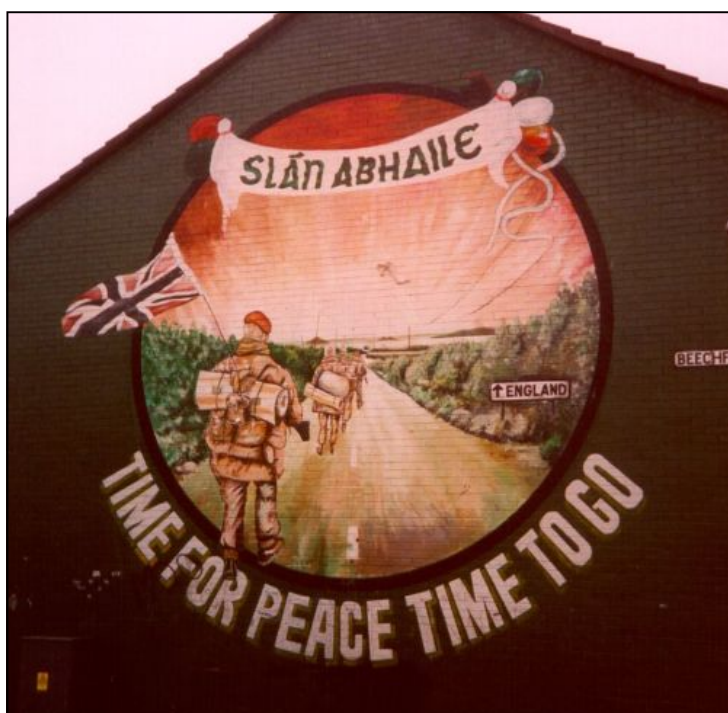
Finally by the 1990s the British and Irish governments agreed that they had to negotiate with all political forces including Sinn Fein and signed the Good Friday Agreement, which if implemented makes partition redundant. This was not before the IRA proved to the British by means of bombing economic and military targets that they cannot expect to oppress a people and for the oppressed not to resist until they have a say in the future of their lives. The Good Friday Agreement of 1996 is the basis on which all the political representatives of the two communities can work together (and have agreed to in the Agreement) to achieve peace and equality.

The British and Irish governments, together with the pro-British Unionist parties, still wanted to keep Sinn Fein out of this process, even though they had an internationally recognised agreement with Sinn Fein being one of the signatories. They used the IRA as an excuse to keep Sinn Fein and their people out of the process. The IRA nevertheless showed their commitment to peace time after time through cease fires and decommissioning of their weapons.

They have also kept Sinn Fein marginalized as much as they can because Sinn Fein is a mass movement that has dozens of councillors, three MPs and four TDs (members of the Irish Parliament, the *Dail*) and it is an anti-imperialist and mass working class socialist movement on British Imperialism's doorstep.

Adams suggested a few months ago to take away the basis of the reactionary's argument - the existence of the IRA. Also he stressed just as importantly, if not more so, that all the volunteers of the IRA with their immense talent and intelligence dedicate themselves fully to the mass political struggle to achieve national liberation and an Ireland based on popular and working class control of the state institutions and fundamental redistribution of wealth from the rich to the masses. As seen clearly seen from this statement below, the IRA agree.

One would hope that things now move forward swiftly towards resolving the injustices of the British occupation of Ireland. However, Sinn Fein are well aware that there are still many challenges that have to be faced, but this time purely through the means of mass political and social struggle.



These challenges are due to the fact that the political establishment of

Ireland see Sinn Fein as a threat as a emerging strong political movement with a militant working class base that is shaping the path of a future Ireland in fundamental ways.

The British want to leave their 800 year old occupation of Ireland while saving face, but still see Sinn Fein as a threat as they are a rapidly growing anti-imperialist and mass working class movement that is 'too close to home' for their liking. However far and fantastic the idea of a revolution seems right now in Britain, the example of Ireland will always be an inspiration to it.

Finally there is the problem of the Loyalist death squads. It is well documented that it is the British security agencies in Ireland (called the 'securocrats' by Sinn Fein) who have armed and encouraged these militias to terrorise the Nationalist population, and also their own population. They are based on fascist religious superiority, and are linked to drug trafficking as well as other criminal mafia style activities. They are currently in a war between themselves, which is also a criminal gang war. Belfast has seen in the most recent period these criminal gangs armed on the street in their dozens and burning and terrorising families from their own communities out of their homes while the British police and army watch on. Of course this is not reported in our press, but can be read in the Irish press and especially the excellent Republican newspaper *An Phoblacht-Republican News*. This shows on our very doorstep the utter hypocrisy of the British state in their 'war on terror', while Britain conducts and oversees terror organisations in Ireland as well as in Iraq and other places.

The Nationalist working class in the north, especially in Belfast still face weekly-armed attacks by these Loyalist gangs. The IRA has always been there to protect them, as it has been a community controlled police force. With no police service that they can trust, this issue of self-defence will be on high on the agenda for the Nationalist community. The Nationalist masses will find solutions to these problems, and, judging from their history and present work, Sinn Fein will be at the forefront of forging these solutions together with the community, as these very people are the core of their support and from which they have come and live amongst. The same can be said of problems of drugs and anti-social activity in the communities.

The Irish freedom fighters in Sinn Fein and the IRA have shown the world how a oppressed people can fight against imperialism and achieve successes towards liberation and equality.

THE STATEMENT

The following historic statement was issued by Óglaigh na hÉireann, the Irish Republican Army, today, Thursday 28 July 2005.

The leadership of Óglaigh na hÉireann has formally ordered an end to the armed campaign. This will take effect from 4pm this afternoon. All IRA units have been ordered to dump arms.

All Volunteers have been instructed to assist the development of purely political and democratic programmes through exclusively peaceful means. Volunteers must not engage in any other activities whatsoever.

The IRA leadership has also authorised our representative to engage with the IICD to complete the process to verifiably put its arms beyond use in a way which will further enhance public confidence and to conclude this as quickly as possible. We have invited two independent witnesses, from the Protestant and Catholic churches, to testify to this.

The Army Council took these decisions following an unprecedented internal discussion and consultation process with IRA units and Volunteers.

We appreciate the honest and forthright way in which the consultation process was carried out and the depth and content of the submissions. We are proud of the comradely way in which this truly historic discussion was conducted.

The outcome of our consultations show very strong support among IRA Volunteers for the Sinn Féin peace strategy. There is also widespread concern about the failure of the two governments and the unionists to fully engage in the peace process. This has created

real difficulties. The overwhelming majority of people in Ireland fully support this process. They and friends of Irish unity throughout the world want to see the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Notwithstanding these difficulties our decisions have been taken to advance our republican and democratic objectives, including our goal of a united Ireland. We believe there is now an alternative way to achieve this and to end British rule in our country.

It is the responsibility of all Volunteers to show leadership, determination and courage. We are very mindful of the sacrifices of our patriot dead, those who went to jail, Volunteers, their families and the wider republican base. We reiterate our view that the armed struggle was entirely

THE IRISH FREEDOM FIGHTERS IN SINN FEIN AND THE IRA HAVE SHOWN THE WORLD HOW A OPPRESSED PEOPLE CAN FIGHT AGAINST IMPERIALISM

legitimate.

We are conscious that many people suffered in the conflict. There is a compelling imperative on all sides to build a just and lasting peace.

The issue of the defence of nationalist and republican communities has been raised with us. There is a responsibility on society to ensure that there is no re-occurrence of the pogroms of 1969 and the early 1970s. There is also a universal responsibility to tackle sectarianism in all its forms.

The IRA is fully committed to the goals of Irish unity and independence and to building the Republic outlined in the 1916 Proclamation.

We call for maximum unity and effort by Irish republicans everywhere. We are confident that by working together Irish republicans can achieve our objectives. Every Volunteer is aware of the import of the decisions we have taken and all Óglaigh are compelled to fully comply with these orders.

There is now an unprecedented opportunity to utilise the considerable energy and goodwill which there is for the peace process. This comprehensive series of unparalleled initiatives is our contribution to this and to the continued endeavours to bring about independence and unity for the people of Ireland.

AN PHOBLACHT/REPUBLICAN NEWS READ THE WEEKLY PAPER OF THE REPUBLICAN MASS MOVEMENT IN IRELAND



'THE ARAB MALCOLM X'

CHE-LEILA INTERVIEW WITH DYAB ABOU JAHJAH

Takawira Chimurenga of Che-Leila interviews Arab European League leader Dyab Abu Jahjah. Born in south Lebanon he migrated to Belgium where he set-up the Arab European League. This is an edited version of the interview which we could not print due to lack of space. Please email Che-Leila to get a copy of the full interview.

www.arabeuropean.org/

Taka: Let's start by talking about the anti-war movement in Europe. What we saw on these anti-war demonstrations were unprecedented numbers of people marching and involved for a while; Belgium saw over one hundred thousand which is a lot for Belgium, in London there were anything up to two million. Ultimately this movement failed to stop the aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq.

What do you think were the gains made by the anti-war movement, if you think there were any gains made, and what do you think were the limitations and negative aspects of the anti-war movement?

Dyab: It's actually very hard to tell because it depends from one country to another. Some countries had no participation or indirect participation in the war. I am sure if you speak to some people in Belgium who were organising these demonstrations, some of them will claim that it was partly due to their demonstrations that Belgium did not send troops. I don't think this is the case as it is the policy of the Belgium government anyway to take like a French line in this issue towards the United States.

On the other hand if I take the demonstration of London, which was one of the biggest, and the ones that took place in Spain or Italy: these did not prevent sending troops. I think it showed two things. First of all a lot of people joined in these demonstrations as kind of a moral position they took towards the war, but they are not really ready to take radical action to stop the war because there hasn't been the continuity of the movement. If you see what happens in some countries promoted by similar types of NGOs and organisations - helped by the CIA of course, like in Georgia or Ukraine - you can see that masses of people, in the millions, are capable of bringing down governments. Of course they have to keep the pressure. Comparatively there hasn't been the mobilisation neither the will among the majority of the people to bring down their governments. It was more a question of washing your hands of the guilt; 'I demonstrate against it therefore I am not for it'. I think that's what it was at the end of the day because we had a demo here and there but no *momentum* and continuous protest that really could bring the economy of the country to a standstill or affect the state's real interests; that didn't take place in Europe.

This is related to the nature in general of this movement. We have been quite active here in Belgium in these platforms and we saw them close-up. I think the majority of the NGOs who take part in these protests and mobilise for them are kind of .. I call it *soft*; I cannot call it anything else. They don't really have a *political* agenda, rather a more ethical and moralistic approach to things and I don't think they are really capable of bringing governments down. So there hasn't really been a political radicalisation that's linked to an anti-war movement.

I think this can take place only if the population is mobilised out of its own interests. I think when the attacks on Madrid happened then there was a different approach to an anti-war position, because we don't want our kids to die. Then people bring governments down or vote them out and so forth.

So that's how I see the anti-war movement. I think it's *nice*, and it gives on the level of perception towards the Arab people a good impression of the European people, they thought 'ok, some Europeans are also against the war' but it doesn't go beyond that.

Taka: I wanted to explore the comparison between the anti-war

movement today and the anti-war movement in the imperialist countries in the 1960s and '70s. Leading up to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 in the British liberal mainstream press such as *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Observer*, there were very prominent radicals, who said, leading up to the invasion, that Britain has to be made ungovernable. They said we have to disrupt Britain functioning, but you know when the invasion actually took place *nothing* of the sort happened. What do you think is the difference between now and the anti-war movement in the USA in the 1970's? Is it that young people were being killed at a high rate in Vietnam, so that had a direct effect ...

Dyab: Yeah.

Taka: You also had social phenomenon such as the Panthers and also militant Latino organisations and *even White* student armed organisations ...

Dyab: It was a different time on so many levels than it is today. The perception of the war was different. On the one hand you had sympathy, ideological sympathy for the other camp in the countries such as Vietnam within the anti-war movement. If you put aside the immigrant communities it is not the case amongst the indigenous population of the West. That played a role. You had also, like you said, the direct involvement and the fact that soldiers had been killed. You see the success of the peace or anti-war movement in the US was linked proportionately to the Vietcong's rate of killing US soldiers. They were a population crying to bring their own soldiers back so that they are not killed. Some of these people who became militant out of this situation made an analysis and had a broader approach to questions. Maybe this is a bit cynical, but I think the essence of that - even by the people who wrote books about why the US should leave Vietnam and explained why the war is not just and the Vietcong have the right to defend their countries - I think the essence of that is, well, its bloody difficult; they are killing us so let us get out of there. The exception would be the Marxists, or movements which have a real commitment to a certain position. I think it is a different time now, I think the radical left is much weaker than in the sixties and seventies. I think that it is still a bit early in the process, even though the resistance is making successes in Iraq. But its still building momentum, its not reached the level of Vietnam, but its going there. Maybe it will reach that level quite soon, but its not there yet. It is going in that direction.

...

Taka: From reading your book, it was clear that the Belgium media had a clear strategy in regard to the AEL and yourself. They depicted you often as a fundamentalist group, as an agent of Hezbollah. I don't know if the police believed their own propaganda, but the way in which they dealt with you and the other leading comrades in the AEL, they seemed to think that you were armed and amassing weapons, judging by the way they arrested you with police snipers and helicopters. Propaganda through the media seemed to be one of the main strategies of the ruling class in Belgium in containing you and criminalizing you. What's your assessment of the media role against the AEL?

Dyab: It's a number of factors. The first thing that brought AEL to the attention of people was our anti-Zionists positions and the Sharon case. This is when we were first noticed by the establishment and we started to be approached and studied. By starting the case against Sharon, it embarrassed Belgium enormously. We had already two powers against us; the Zionists lobby which is very powerful here who have friends in the political class and in the economic and media sectors. At the same time, the regular establishment, especially on the part of parties like the VLD [right-wing Liberal Party], even to a certain extent to Socialist Party that are Labour Party look-alikes. We had many demonstrations in Brussels and they all went smoothly, the police were reserved because the French speaking part of the state of Belgium has a different approach to

policing and immigration. However, I wouldn't say that there was *no* tension on these demonstrations in Brussels. But the *first* demonstration in Antwerp went badly. Why? The story of which I explained in the book and I don't want to explain it again but there has been a clear provocation by the police, they wanted a fight with us. And they did. Who played a role in that? We have already mentioned the Zionists, the far-right; it was the Vlaams Blok, the far-right that has extensively infiltrated the police.

So there were all these things coming together. We had the riots, the said it was like *kristallnacht* in Antwerp which was a gross exaggeration. What happened was that there was some small scale riots with some teenagers, that was it and they broke a couple of police cars and shop windows and hundreds of youth were arrested. Their attitude after that was that they felt that they had to destroy the AEL completely. All these forces united under that strategy. On the one hand the Zionists who wanted to destroy us, the far-right who wanted to destroy us; the whole political spectrum who also wanted to destroy us. Together with that the AEL had already attacked all the structures around the immigration and integration industry as we call it. This angered the people who see themselves as the defenders of the immigrants, because we exposed their techniques as paternalistic and colonial. These people wanted to destroy the AEL too, because we said that you are bastards that want to take advantage of our plight and you are part of the problem. So *everybody* was against us. It was a situation where we had no friends. The most progressive and left-wing newspaper so-called in Belgium called *Die Morgen*, they were the ones who started a whole manipulation campaign based upon lies which the intelligence services of the state has been fabricating (which was proved by the book by Ludo de Witte). It was a case of media manipulation instigated by the whole political establishment who wanted to get rid of the AEL for many reasons.

Taka: You have no regrets about the fact that you said that you had no friends?

Dyab: Definitely not! There was no other way. Either we sell-out or we make everyone our enemy. I don't think that we could have avoided that. Then we had to drop anti-Zionism, we had to drop an anti-establishment position, we had to drop anti-racism, we had to not tell them they are racists, we had to tell them they were doing great; then we would have stayed acceptable. Being all these things; anti-racist, anti-Zionist, anti-establishment and anti-corruption, we just made everyone our enemy.

Taka: How did this media and state campaign effect your potential primary support base amongst the Arab community?

Dyab: It's a double edged sword. On the one hand it created the support because many people could filter the media and see through it and join us, and they did, and we grew because of that. On the other hand it limited us because a *bigger* group of people could not filter the criminalisation and saw us as being really extremist and a bunch of trouble makers and stayed away. So it gave us a certain amount of support from the people who could see through these mechanisms, but it also destroyed our image with the bigger group. We could turn things around for a while in certain places where we had a presence like in Antwerp or Mechelen, where we were present on the ground so we could talk to people, so we negated and neutralised the effect of the media there. But in other places like in Limburg where we do not have an active branch and people knew us only through the TV, they believed the TV. Or most of them did anyway.

...

Taka: One thing that is very impressive was frankly your leadership. It was a very oppressive context of a massive campaign, for Belgian standards, against the AEL and the Arab community, especially the youth; Mohamed Achrak being shot dead by a racist in the AEL stronghold of Borgerhout in Antwerp, against you personally and your close comrades, friends and family, and in the very intense international situation in that period of the Zionist atrocities against the Palestinian people, the aggression against Afghanistan after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon and the build up to the invasion of Iraq. One thing that really stands out in the book - and the book is an account of the AEL in *exactly* this period - is this picture that the AEL actually *never* gave a green light to their street support, such as 'we have had enough, do what the hell you want'.

Dyab: Yes.

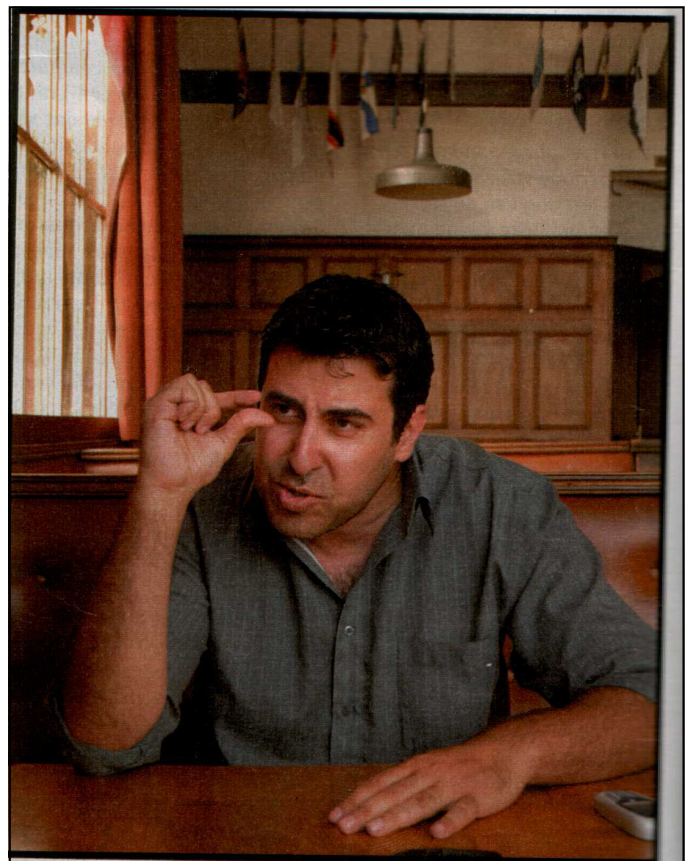
Taka: There was one moment when the AEL stewards on demonstrations got sick and tired of the police; the AEL stewards were ensuring these demonstrations kept within peaceful limits, and essentially stopped the anger of the Arab youth spilling over into levels of rioting and this of course created tensions between the Arab youth and the AEL. The AEL decided that this was creating too much stress between them and the youth, so stopped the stewarding and left it up to the police to deal with. Do you have any regrets about keeping that discipline on your demonstrations?

Dyab: Definitely. That's the only regret I have and I have said this openly in an interview with a Dutch language Belgian magazine, that the only regret I have is that we did not burn Antwerp in 2002. That's the only regret I have, because they blamed us for it anyway, and we should have done it, because they were talking and acting as if we did, as if we were a threat to society. Actually what we did was preventing such a thing occurring. That's something I deeply regret. I think it was needed and I think it would have been normal and a natural response from the anger of the people to manifest itself in that way. We *did* channel the anger of the people in one-way or another and calm it down. We thought we were doing the right thing, but looking at it now don't think we were. Because nothing changed, they hit us hard; they are still hitting us hard, they are still keeping us from really having the impact that we want. At the end of the day maybe that was a historical opportunity. Not to *instigate* anything - but we did not *have* to instigate anything, it was out there, it was exploding, and we calmed it down.

Taka: To be honest I wasn't expecting you to say that you *did* regret that, but I think you are talking especially the time after Brother Mohamed Achrak was killed in Borgerhout.

Dyab: Yes.

Taka: In your book, you wrote about the moment where you went to the local Masjid [Mosque] in Borgerhout, and the young people demanded that you speak to the congregation. What you said in the Mosque, well, you wanted to show respect to the family and to their sensitivities and not to be opportunistic. Basically you called on the young people to take time to pray and reflect on the situation. That was a very explosive situation; the young people were looking towards you and what you would say they would follow. With the benefit of hindsight how do you see *that* particular moment?



Dyab: When I say I regret that we really did not go for it I am thinking of these moments because they were difficult decisions to make. On the one hand the family wants you to calm things down; on the other hand the killer was arrested; we did not know that they were gonna *free* him. We already heard that the mayor said its not a racist murder but we saw that as a cheap political statement. But the killer was arrested. In a way the fact that I had to call the shot at that moment, about whether we fight or we don't, gave me a deep sense of responsibility. I looked at these people there, ok, they will go out and riot all night and many more things, but if they got shot ... it wasn't a easy decision to make. I did not know what was going to happen afterwards. I did not know that they were going to blame us anyway, that actually that the AEL would be hit hard for that moment. I thought that we are *starting* as a movement, we are working positively to change the situation, and we don't need war in the streets.

Taka: What you are saying is that there were riots anyway at that time?

Dyab: And we calmed them down.

Taka: But they still blamed the AEL for them?

Dyab: The blamed the AEL for what happened *before* we went to the Mosque. For actually calming people down.

Taka: That was the situation when they penned in hundreds of young people, children and families, sprayed people with pepper spray etc?

Dyab: Yes. From that moment a small group did not calm down and did some rioting, but it was a very tiny group but they blamed the AEL for that. Al in all, I did not *want* to make that call. But I should have not calmed people down. I don't think I had the all-seeing eye to judge whether it's a good thing to go for a riot, I don't think I would have *ever* said, yea lets go riot. What we should have not done, or what we should have not done is let it be. When people get killed, when you have a city where the far-right is dehumanising our community day in day out, then of course this is a result of that for the most part; well then things should happen.

Taka: Part of the reason why you called for what you did at that moment was a simple numbers issue, being that the Arab community is very small vis-à-vis the white community, and there would have been a bloodbath. In your book you said it would have been 'suicide' for there to have taken place a violent clash, so now how do you see the future civil clashes taking place?

Dyab: I was confronted with that situation later when I was in jail where I was offered a compromise to be freed on the condition of not attending public demonstrations for three months. I was being informed while I was in jail that what was going on at that moment was that our guys outside, our youth, were preparing ... they were talking about one thousand Molotov cocktails. If I wasn't freed that Tuesday, they gave an ultimatum to Ahmed Azzuz, who was leading Antwerp AEL at that time, that they are not going to listen to him anymore and they are going to use what they have. Again, that looked to me like suicide, because you cannot control the dynamic of such a thing. With the balance of power that there is you would have hundreds of people arrested, not for a couple of days but years, and I am sure that you will have been shot dead. You will lose anyway, and the AEL will be destroyed forever. At that moment I wasn't thinking and I shouldn't think 'great, yeah let them do that'. No I will prevent that from happening and accept the compromise. I think that was the right decision, it was something beyond which ... you are talking about the total destruction of the dynamic, not really a new dynamic, like an explosion at a certain moment and then things would be calm for years to come. We were hopeful and we are still hopeful on building a movement and crystallising later on when we get stronger, and that's how we are still thinking. The other thing is that the normal riots that were taking place, we should have not intervened and let Antwerp burn by the spontaneous reaction of the people, but for our *own* militants to attack the police with molotovs, that would have been too much. That would

have been really the end of the AEL, we would have all been in jail for ten fifteen years not to mention the people who would have been shot dead.

Taka: The AEL experience in Belgium is something that *all* anti-racists and anti-imperialists should learn from, especially in the West. What you have is a mature and clear leadership and *because* of this the state reacted in such an extreme way as it did, because they know you are a threat and no joke.

I wondered if you agreed that in the movement in general you have highs and lows, ebbs and flows, periods of great mobilisations and politicisation where people are on the move, and then you have periods of political calm. For me one of the most important things of that period we are talking, from 2000 to 2003, the AEL got its message out to the mass of Arab people in Belgium, and not only was a message got out but you were *active* in your community. And that won't be forgotten, because the next time things are on the rise people know from experience where you stand, and they will have some confidence as to where you will stand in the present situation. I wanted to get your views on that perspective.

Dyab: I do believe in cycles and political mobilisation, and I think we were indeed in a peak in that period, and its very normal that we are trying to regain momentum and consolidate what we have and look for new dynamics. That has also to do with people and generation changes, new people come in and people drop out. You always need to restructure according to this. The role of the AEL as an organisation has not been played out yet.



These first five years of our organisation are just the birth pains; the AEL will be stronger in the next five to ten years. The challenge for us is to survive as a movement and to keep our base and our presence; this time not to channel but to contain and push forward a certain momentum in the community. When there is need to protest and go against the establishment what we want is to gather that need in our own movement and launching ourselves again. We will use the experience we have and using the fact that we will not be a new organisation anymore, but we will have our recognition factor that we can use whether towards the establishment or towards our own community. So that's how we see that in the long term. I don't think that will be a problem when that happens.

The only thing is, the context is getting more complex, and I think that there is a feeling among certain people in our community who support and sympathise with us that we are not enough; that it is *soft* and it doesn't work that way, they think political protest will lead to nothing.

There is a real situation where people are getting more radical and are willing to go other ways including violent ways. I has an interview with *Humo*, the Dutch Belgian magazine this week, and I told them that I think we are going to ethnic civil war. It's gonna be in a way a class war but with a ethnic tint on it. People will refer to the AEL as an inspiration but they will not be the AEL, they will have other organisations. The AEL will keep saying that we are using democratic means and peaceful means but we will say that we *understand* these people. It will be something like the *Sinn Fein*, *IRA* situation. Maybe there will be some level of intertwining. Now we hope there will be some measures, clear measures, to prevent that, but these measures will have to be radical. You have to *solve* some issues here. In a country like Belgium you can prevent such a confrontation because on an international scale Belgium is not very high profile, it's a small country, it's basically not very keen on following the US everywhere. OK, they do some stupid things like let the weapons pass. If they solve their internal racist exclusion problems we can avoid that in Belgium, an ethnic civil war. I think in France it will be difficult to avoid, although it is possible to avoid it there. In Britain it gets complex too. As long as nothing happens, no solutions are found on employment, exclusion, it's gonna happen. Its deterministic. With the international context of today, with the ethnic cleavage that exists, it's bound to happen and it's not gonna take long.

Taka: Very recently the AEL held a demonstration at the Egyptian embassy in Brussels. In your press release you said it was against dictatorship in Egypt. What was that about?

Dyab: Well, it's part of the enemy camp. We see the enemy on the one hand the invaders and the colonisers, including the US and Zionists; the second part of the enemy, although its one camp, are the dictatorships. On a more radical note the states themselves, because we are Arab Nationalists, we don't believe in these states. As long as they exist colonialism exists because colonialism created them. We believe if you democratise them the people will choose to eventually eliminate them, so the fight is with the dictators too. We don't believe that one fight should be postponed against another, they are both the enemies. That's the clear message that, for example, the Egyptian movement *Kifayah* [Enough] is giving. This is the most radical and daring one, and they are not Islamists.

It's the first movement that went to the street and said to hell with Mubarak, we are not slaves - and said it out in the open. The Muslim Brothers never did that, they do it inside the Universities. *Kifayah* did that and started with a small group of Nasserists and communists, and they started gaining momentum and support and they now have branches everywhere in Egypt. They keep going for it. The police are using all kinds of techniques to harass them, beat them up, they are trying whatever they can but they cannot stop it. At the same time it's not your US friendly movement. If you go to their internet site the first thing you see is 'Our Arab Nation.' Very clear Arab Nationalist angle, they don't talk about just Egypt as such, they talk about facing two dangers. The danger of the Zionists/ American great Middle East project, and the second danger is the dictatorships that are exhausting and keeping down our people. It's a perfect analysis and it's our analysis and that's why we link up with these people and try to give this message here and wherever we are.

Taka: What effect has the *Kifayah* movement had on the Muslim Brotherhood rank and file?

Dyab: It has provoked them, because till now the Muslim Brotherhood was selling itself as the only real opposition movement within Egypt. All of a sudden they saw these Nationalists and leftists going to the streets, gaining respect, gaining support, gaining momentum and international attention, and at the same time being anti-US, so they cannot be called pro-US, so they got provoked and said that they have to do that too and said 'we have to do the same'. But then failed to do that! It's a huge movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, but they could not mobilise more than a couple of thousand outside of campuses, their thing is to mobilise inside of campuses. But to go the streets.... and of course the regime hit them hard. The bottom line the moderate ones are calling for joining the *Kifayah* movement that will be a very new thing if they do, but there is a whole discussion about that.

Taka: 'Moderate' in what sense?

Dyab: Let's say the new generation in the Muslim Brotherhood - they are saying 'lets join with these people', but this is unclear. The position of the Brotherhood is also very unclear in Egypt. They said if Mubarak allows multiple candidates they will support him. I mean they have always been unclear. The only time they were clear was when Nasser

was in power - they were clearly against him! But with Sadat they were unclear, now they are unclear, before with King Farouk they were unclear. They don't have the credibility outside of their own environment to claim to be the main opposition, and now with *Kifayah* they just lost that.

Taka: What are your hopes for the Muslim Brotherhood vis-à-vis *Kifayah* and a movement against the Egyptian state?

Dyab: My hope would be a new generation will take over and kick out the old guard. They would say let's bridge that past gap and have an alliance with the communists and Nasserists and build a big momentum there. The Muslim Brotherhood does not have more support than the others, for example the Nasserists in Egypt, but it has more structure and more money. They are very organised and financially very strong. If they add their structure and their money to a movement like *Kifayah* on equal grounds, and people of *Kifayah* add their communication expertise and let's say the broad support they have, I think they can make something very significant. I don't see that happening. The Muslim Brotherhood is very sectarian, and they will stay like that - they want to lead or nothing.

...

Taka: Part of the Imperialist project in the region is interfering in Lebanon. What are your thoughts on what's going on there?

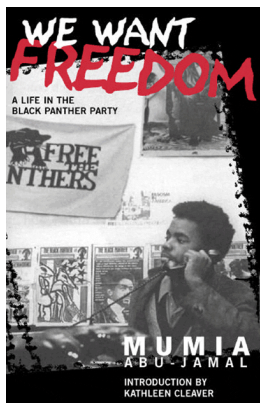
Dyab: What's going on there for me is very clear actually; the US wants to disarm Hezbollah in anticipation of an attack on Iran. Because if that occurs and Hezbollah have their weapons they will use them against Israel, and neither the Israelis nor the US want that. They are gonna keep going after Hezbollah and keep destabilising the situation in order to create the conditions for that. I don't see that happening, and I don't see how that will happen unless they come and take it themselves.

Taka: Not being able to disarm Hezbollah does not stop the US from intensifying their provocations?

Dyab: They are gonna continue doing that. You have all these FBI agents who are investigating the Hariri murder; while they are there they put some other bombs, and they go and investigate them after they blow them up! It's so transparent, everyone knows that. Especially now, when they are trying to kill people close to the Syrians. They want to create civil war in Lebanon, that's their aim. It's difficult. They can break down the security for a while, but who is gonna fight? If I look around the country, no one wants to fight, nobody is *capable* of fighting except Hezbollah who have weapons. The others are not in that frame anymore. People learned a bit from the civil war, so the Lebanese don't want that again. Now on the political level, forces in Lebanon are compromising. I see the US as having a difficult task there; one - to get civil war, which will be difficult to impossible, and second - to disarm Hezbollah which is even more difficult. The most they can do is to try and destabilise the situation and make it insecure and hope that Israel will do something. Lately there has been clashing on the borders - at least the Israelis are claiming this, while the Hezbollah are denying it. If there are not clashes but the Israelis are saying that there are, it can be preparation for some kind of attack. Interesting times are coming.

Taka: We will leave it there Dyab, thanks so much.

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THE IRAQI NATIONAL RESISTANCE

INTERVIEW TAKEN FROM COUNTERPUNCH

Voices of Resistance

An Interview with Dr. Mohammad al-Obaidi of Iraq's Peoples' Struggle Movement LAITH al-SAUD, CounterPunch July 12, 2005

The mainstream media's attenuation of information regarding Iraq has now rendered public discourse about US policy in Iraq incoherent and incomprehensible. In spite of rising death and tragedy in Iraq, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld claims "progress". Instead of debating the criminality of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, the New York Times and Washington Post are discussing what Dick Cheney actually meant by "last throes." And, of course, instead of finding a way to end the destructive campaign that the Bush administration inflicts on the Iraqi people, Americans are being asked for open-ended commitment to war. Completely obliterated in all this is the suppression by the mainstream media of an entire side of the issue: the opposition. Opposition is always a check on hegemony, and the domination of the Bush administration's point of view in the mainstream media has induced complacency on the part of American officials-to the point they do not have to make sense or speak the truth.

Clearly, opposition to the occupation of Iraq does not consist only of Iraqis, but many others. But with all due respect to the global moral support that the Iraqi people have in their resistance, what we are concerned with here are what actual Iraqi intellectuals, professionals and community leaders who are connected to Iraq have to say of the situation.

What follows is an interview, (in what is hoped to be a series of interviews of individuals and groups,) with someone actually connected to Iraq and those opposed to the American occupation. I should add that while I make no secret of my moral and political support for the Iraqis' right to defend themselves, convincing the reader to adopt the same position is not the intention of the following discussion. It is simply to provide more information regarding one of the most important issues of our time.

Dr. Mohammad al-Obaidi is a member of the People's Struggle Movement, more information on this group can be found at www.kifah.org in which links are provided to their political communiqué, available in English.

Laith al-Saud: Many in the Bush administration argue that the resistance is made up of former regime members who have been marginalized by the current situation and by so-called "foreign fighters." What is your assessment and how does the resistance view the former regime?

Dr. Mohammad al-Obaidi: The Iraqi people in general and the Iraqi National Resistance, which is its real name and nature, know that this claim is part of the propaganda and psychological warfare being targeted at Iraqis. What is clear on the ground is that the resistance is made of a plurality of groups with a single aim -- namely to end the occupation of Iraq. The plurality of the resistance is a strength, not a weakness, as it shows that it is a nationalist resistance where being Iraqi trumps any sort of sectarianism -- religious, ethnic, ideological or otherwise. It is well known in Iraq that the resistance is comprised of all sects and segments of Iraqi society: Islamists, Ba'athists, patriotic nationalists, and above all Arab Sunnis and Shii's.

The Americans claimed before the last assault on Fallujah that the majority of the freedom fighters are so-called "foreign" Arabs and Muslims. (Though, after the inhumane destruction of Fallujah American officials openly said that [non-Iraqi] Arab fighters represent no more than 2% of the total number of freedom fighters in Iraq.) Most important, however, is the practical and logical conclusion that the

Iraqis come to. When the US invaded Iraq she brought with her troops from all around the world. From thousands of miles away, from every quarter, the US employed several nations to occupy our country, so why can't our brother Arabs come to our country to help us defend our land and kick the occupiers out? This is a very logical question that I would like to ask the American people.

As for the resistance's view of Saddam's regime, I think that all resistance factions condemn the regime for what happened in Iraq, but in the meantime we must keep in mind that the regime is gone now and forever and the Americans cannot hold Iraq hostage with the memory of the past.

LS: How should the world distinguish between those groups who belong to the Iraqi National Resistance and those who do not?

MO: By actions. It is known to all Iraqis that any operation carried out by the resistance targets the occupation and the security forces. It must be kept in mind that at this point in time, with the absence of any true sovereignty in Iraq, the security forces are merely an extension of the occupation itself. Those operations that do otherwise and target civilians can be said for certain to not belong to the National Resistance. For example, hundreds upon hundreds of university professors, military pilots, scientists and doctors have been killed in Iraq. What possible benefit would the resistance have in attacking our country's most talented and educated people? It is clear to all Iraqis that there are foreign fingers pulling the triggers to commit these crimes and murder the human resources of Iraq, all the while attempting to steal the country's natural resources.

LS: Although many opposition groups in Iraq have repeatedly and explicitly condemned the targeting of innocent civilians in the country, the Bush administration has continually charged that this is part of the resistance's strategy. What is your response?

MO: Once again, this has always been part of the propaganda of the occupiers. As I have said no resistance groups has ever targeted civilians or condoned it. All groups have clearly said that their targets are not and never will be the Iraqi people. How could it? The National Resistance is made up of the Iraqi people. Yet the question remains why do the occupiers not say anything of the killings being carried out by the militias that have been allowed to operate in our country, such as the peshmerga and the Badr Brigade? We have repeated reports that such militias have targeted clerics, worshippers and other Iraqis who have opposed the occupation and the current puppet government in Iraq. Yet the occupying powers and the international community in general have remained completely silent.

LS: How have Iraqis who you have spoken to in the country described the nature of the occupation and the resistance?

MO: Allow me to answer your question with another question. How would anyone feel if they had lost a loved one to an aggressive invasion and occupation? There are hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who find themselves in such a position and have lost dear ones to the hands of the occupiers. This is not to mention the prisoners, both men and women, who have families in the thousands. The destructiveness of the occupation affects the vast majority of Iraqis in a negative way and thus they are fed up with the presence of occupiers on our land. The resistance is not short on recruits to join them, as it is not difficult to find people sympathetic with the goals of the resistance in the country. Quite simply there are hundred of thousands of people in Iraq who are ready to sacrifice their lives for their country.

Let me add one more thing. How do you think Iraqis would react when

they do not have electricity and clean water for many days in the heat of our summer? It has been more than two years of occupation and yet the infrastructure of Iraq remains in shambles. Please do not claim that this is due to sabotage by the armed resistance, as we know where the resources are going and how they are being spent. It is a collective punishment to all Iraqis, particularly in Baghdad and other areas where the resistance is very active.

LS: You suggest that the US military and administration has used methods of collective punishment in Iraq. What evidence can be shared with the world that this is happening in Iraq?

MO: I am not suggesting, Laith. I am confirming that this is what is happening in Iraq. No one can deny what the US military has done in Fallujah, Sammarra, Ramadi, Karbala, Heet, Qaim and other towns and cities. People have been denied water, electricity, medical treatment and other services. This has not only been confirmed by Iraqi eyewitnesses on the ground, which should be enough, but by international services such as the Red Crescent and others. Is that not collective punishment? Think of Baghdad for a moment. People in Baghdad never have electricity for three or four continuous days or clean running water for a week's time. Reuters has published photos of American soldiers swimming in the cool and clean water of a pool in one of Saddam's palaces; let the world compare this to the many photos of Iraqi children fighting for clean water.

In addition, we also have many reports of American soldiers sabotaging main water stations. Take for example, the main water station in al-Karkh outside of Baghdad, eyewitnesses testify that there was a huge explosion just minutes after US soldiers left the site. Why does the world not raise concern over these accounts? Is it because they are being offered by Iraqis? It is time that the international community started to listen to Iraqis and not the lies of an occupying power that has never been shown to tell the truth.

LS: Donald Rumsfeld recently claimed that the resistance lacks unity and has no vision for the future of the country? In this regard what are the long-term goals of the resistance?

MO: Rumsfeld's claim is absolutely not true. The resistance factions are first and foremost united in ending the occupation and all traces of it. All resistance groups, which maintain strong ties and communications at all levels, believe they have a responsibility to all Iraqi people and are committed to defending the rights of the Iraqi people. It is very important that Iraq is completely liberated of all traces of the occupation and its effects; including the political, legal and social consequences of the occupation. As for the long-term goals, we seek a unified (non-federal), pluralistic and democratic Iraq where all Iraqis are thought of in terms of citizenship rather than ethnicity or sect. We are not opposed to elections. We are opposed to elections under occupation as they are tainted by the powers and pressures of the occupying forces. If anyone has questions as to the goals of the Iraqi National Resistance all they have to do is listen to the public spokespersons of the opposition in Iraq. The goals of the resistance have always been made clear.

LS: What, then, is the resistance's position towards the current government in Iraq?

MO: First of all the resistance, which represents the will of the majority of Iraqis is certain that the election was a violation of international law. International charters that regulate the relationship between occupiers and occupied do not give occupying authorities the mandate to instigate a change in the country's social, economic, and political structure.

The election has changed the political composition of Iraq to suit the interests of the occupation of the authorities. The changes led, as we can now see, to ethnic, sectarian and religious divisions that the Iraqi people have succeeded in avoiding. Historically, Iraqis have always co-existed without any consideration of sectarianism or ethnic division; only after the country was stricken by the US-led occupation did the spectre of civil war loom. These divisions serve the purposes of the occupying power as it is clearly and beyond any doubt an exercise in divide and conquer.

The resistance, both political and martial, see that all steps have been taken to secure full US domination of decision makers in Iraq. A look at the electoral process and the composition of the current national council reveals that the election's main mission and accomplishment was the installation of some of the country's most notorious politicians who have often spoken proudly of their links to international intelligence agencies.

Take for example Iyad Allawi and Ahmed Chalabi. The election has given power to every politician who has assisted the invaders and collaborated with them to consolidate the occupation; therefore the resistance confidently asserts that the political decision-making process in Iraq is taking place in the US embassy inside Baghdad and that the elected government is not more than a vehicle to carry out Washington's decisions.



It is difficult for any sensible person to believe that the US would give up its domination of Iraq after spending billions of dollars and sacrificing the lives of hundreds of its soldiers. Iraqis never believed that the US would simply allow free and democratic elections that could, and would, result in a government that would make its first priority ending the occupation. In fact, the main purpose of the election process was to secure a government that will facilitate long-lasting agreements with the US to keep its forces on Iraqi soil and transform the country into an American colony.

The US administration has worked hard to portray the Iraq election as a political achievement to cover over the scar that the war has left on its credibility. Washington has used the election card to pull the wool over the eyes of the international community and prevent it from seeing the tragic consequences that the war has left on the Iraqi people. For all these reasons, the resistance will also fight the current puppet government the same way they are fighting the occupiers.

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ON THE ARAB AND ISLAMIC STRUGGLE

CHE-LEILA INTERVIEW WITH MOHAMED HASSAN

Che-Leila member *Takawira* interviews Ethiopian Marxist intellectual *Mohamed Hassan*.

This is the first part of a series of interviews conducted with Mohamed Hassan. The second part will deal with developments in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq.

We hope that these interviews broaden and deepen the debate and study into the political developments in the Islamic and Arab world as a result of the aggression against it.

The movement of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the two leaders of the movement which is commonly known as 'al-Qaeda', are a product of imperialist oppression and terror against the Arab nation and in many countries which have a majority Muslim population.

Furthermore, and importantly for those in the 'West', this conflict is creating greater civil crisis *within* the Western countries. These times are demanding that progressives everywhere study these developments in order to struggle so to put an end to imperialist oppression and in order to create peace and friendship between the peoples in the West and in the neo-colonies.

This interview is rather unique in the English language in that it is one of the few articles, from a Marxist and anti-imperialist perspective, that addresses these issues in some detail.

Mohamed Hassan asked that two articles by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels be mentioned in this introduction, on the *Chinese revolt in 1857*, and the *First Indian War of Independence in 1857* which can be found at the following links:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/09/16.htm>

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/06/05.htm>

These articles show how the founders of modern socialism dealt with the early stages of the anti-colonial movements of their time. Despite the fact that the colonial peoples in these rebellions committed atrocities which revolutionaries would not advocate, Marx and Engels nevertheless recognised that these uprisings on the whole raised the anti-colonial struggle to a whole new advanced stage of struggle *and should be supported*.

Cde Hassan welcomes replies, comments, questions and criticisms arising from this interview to his email:

ali.mohamed@pandora.be

There will be another interview conducted with Cde Hassan arising from the reactions and comments to this interview and the subjects contained within it.

Takawira

On the London bombs and al-Qaeda

Takawira : Comrade Hassan, would you like to make a general comment on the attacks in London last week?

MH: I think that one has to go back to two years ago to the statement of the Anglican and Catholic Church in Great Britain on the eve of the Iraqi invasion when they sent a letter to British Prime Minister Tony Blair telling him *very clearly* that;

1, there is no justice in this war,

2, this war has no moral or ethical value,

3, it is not a war for defence where you have been attacked from outside, it is a war of aggression.

It even mentioned in the same letter that this war will create a very big wall of division among the British population and it that this war against Iraq may bring a civil war in Britain. It is a far-sighted analysis. I think what happened in London is what they predicted over two years ago.

Knowing that British society has a very big Muslim population and other people from Third World origins who have been feeling attacked and identify themselves with the Iraqi population, it is normal that such kind of things will happen in England. It didn't surprise me. What surprised me is that it didn't happen immediately following the invasion.

It is an attack that has killed innocent people. For those who have lost their families and loved ones, I give my condolences.

I convey my same condolences for more than one hundred thousand who have died in Iraq. They are also innocent civilians, their whole country is being destroyed the whole infrastructure is destroyed. Five million people have been put into a very severe condition. There is even now the export of human organs from Iraq. Many Iraqis are now living by selling their blood to blood banks in order to survive. Around one hundred thousand Iraqis are in prison. The whole Iraqi nation has become a concentration camp. I can imagine that some young people can react and they are desperate to do something about it. I think in this regard the declaration of the Church was very clear.

Taka: Have you heard of any reactions from the liberation movements in Afghanistan or Iraq on these attacks in London?

MH: I have not heard anything. But it could very well be that this is a British phenomenon. Britain is an aggressor in Iraq. The ruling class in Britain have decided on an aggressive and unjust war by invading a sovereign country which is a member of the United Nations, without any mandate. *All* the arguments of the British state in waging war has been proved to be false and lies, so probably they have ignited a civil war in their own society. It could be a pure British reaction.

Taka: In the current crisis of imperialism, particularly that of the US and the British Imperialists, imperialism is continuing to pursue a strategy of terror and aggression for world domination. In this context it may well be that these manifestations of civil strife in the Western countries will grow. If so, what are the ramifications for the societies such as Belgium, Holland, but particularly Britain and the USA?

MH: Well, one has to put this in the general developments in the world since the last seventy or eighty years. The conditions of the world have changed after the Bolshevik Revolution, particularly later on after the defeat of Nazism and when Eastern European socialism was established. A lot of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles have been maintained in the Third World, most of the countries became independent and sovereign. On the basis of that in most of the countries as far as education is concerned their consciousness, knowing their rights, knowing the world situation, knowing their place in the world has also increased.

Despite the collapse of the USSR and East European socialism resulting in a change of the balance of power in the world, the aggressiveness of US Imperialism to dominate the world has increased. But US Imperialism has been proved to be a paper tiger in Iraq. Even Rumsfeld and his group are saying that the US cannot wage two wars simultaneously because of the situation they find themselves in Iraq due to the resistance of the Iraqi people.

The Iraqi resistance has proved that it is impossible for US Imperialism to wage and maintain war while they are facing serious problems in Iraq and maintaining war in Afghanistan as well as maintaining war in other places. This has exposed the weakness of US Imperialism on the ground. British Imperialism is connected *particularly* to the Middle East because of its oil interests and their defence of certain Arab regimes, feudal Arab regimes which are subsidising the British economy.

Britain has since the first Gulf War [1991] continued with the US to *illegally* bomb Iraq without any mandate, imposing an inhuman embargo, trying to overthrow the previous regime internally by financing vigilante groups, terrorists and so on and so forth.

As far as terrorism is concerned, the 'war against terror' and the 'anti-terror' laws is *itself* terror. To give you an example, the killing of the Nigerian judge by US vigilante in Nigeria, the elimination of certain figures and politicians in Lebanon – what's happening now. The anti-terror laws which have been applied in the US combines a lot of things, but it includes eliminating public figures in any country in the world.

The US has started the terror. Their terror is limitless and it is global. Of course their propaganda machine is very big. They try to fool the US and British white working class and dividing them from the rest of the working class by stating that there is terrorism against them from outside.

You see, in the Arab world before 11th September most well to do Arab middle class families used to send their children to England and the US. Now of course, after 11th September and the vigilante action and terror within the US has frightened the Muslims, and non Muslims for that matter from the Third World, from going to the US because of the repercussions of terror which is applied in the US against Muslims and Arabs specifically.

Taka: We have seen certain state oppression and civil clashes manifesting themselves in different forms developing in recent years in Belgium, Holland, Spain, France and in Britain and the US. One could argue that this is going to increase, and is going to polarise the working class along religious and national lines. How do you think that progressives, the anti-war movement and people in general should react to this?

MH: First of all one has to analyse Political Islam from a historical perspective. Political Islam is a political movement which has an ideology of its own. It is basically led by the petit bourgeoisie, sometimes even by the national bourgeoisie. Political Islam in the beginning had difficulties in their own countries with nationalists and anti-imperialist forces. They came into collision with Nasserism in Egypt, also with the Baathists in Iraq and particularly Syria. Because of these contradictions, on the one side the Zionists and the other side the feudal rulers like Saudi Arabia utilised the Muslim Brotherhood and other forces that are based on Political Islam against Arab Nationalist movements and against communists and left anti-imperialist movements.

But in the process the movement made an evolution. Once they were imprisoned in Egypt if you take Egyptian Islamic Jihad, they split inside the prison. The *jihadist* concept developed in prison with Qutb and Zawahiri who believed that they must continue with armed struggle to overthrow the regime. Of course the Egyptian jihadists have tried armed struggle inside Egypt but they later realised that the Egyptian conditions were not suitable. There are no jungles or forests, no mountainous areas in Egypt. The Egyptian army and intelligence services and their supporters were too strong for them. So they designed another strategy and tactics when they travelled to Afghanistan. There they are allies against the Soviets, but at the same time they are regrouping and organising their own cells and movements.

Once the Soviet Union collapsed, gradually US Imperialist arrogance was proved under Clinton when he bombarded Baghdad after the first Gulf War. They figured that they have overthrown one enemy, now the bigger Satan is the US, the enemy is US Imperialism and they decided that they must fight it. One of the *principles* demands of their struggle is that the US must leave Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a royal family, it is a family business where there is no constitution, there is no central bank, while they are controlling 25% of the world's oil, they are subsidising the US economy, and so on. They say that they must overthrow these people, there must be a change.



The whole Saudi community, all the forces except the most background and reactionary elements, today they see Osama bin Laden as their hero in Saudi Arabia. He maybe seen by the West as a horrible man but in Saudi Arabia for the Saudis they see him as a national hero. *All* forces are organising under the image of him, whether they are secular, left, Baathist, nationalist. They are under the umbrella of this image, who want to overthrow and create a democratic country with a constitution, with accountability. Apart from that they also say that the oil wells are *Arab* wells and they have to be distributed to the poorer Arab countries. Not only for the Arab countries but also to poor Muslim countries because they have the right to share the wealth from the wells of Saudi Arabia and the wells of other feudal states in the Gulf.

In Saudi Arabia now there is a very big movement, military and non-military. There is a civil movement which was hidden and organised secretly, and there is also military combat. The day before yesterday they have discovered according to Saudi reports, a lot of weapons captured at the border with Yemen. This shows that a big part of the Saudi armed forces are connected to and supporting the movement. The al-Qaeda branch in Saudi Arabia is a nationalist movement. They want to overthrow the regime and establish democratic country, democratic within their own culture and values, and also to control their own national resources which are totally controlled by US Imperialism. If they succeed in Saudi Arabia the result will be that the other small feudal states will collapse. US Imperialism of course will be weakened if these people succeed in Saudi Arabia.

Taka: Do you think that this analysis has to be popularised in the West?

MH: It *has* to be popularised.

Taka: To make sense of what's going on?

MH: To make sense of what's going on. First of all there is very little to no reports in the Western media. In the whole Gulf States there are seven million workers. Sixty percent of them are from the Third World. The remaining forty percent are from imperialist countries who earn on average *seventy* times what they were earning in their own country. They are living in ghettos. These ghettos are the opposite of the ghettos in the imperialist countries where there is poverty, but the ghettos of these white so-called expatriates working in these countries are the most luxurious ghettos with swimming pools, *everything* is inside and they are walled in. The excuse for this is that these countries are Islamic. Inside these ghettos there is no Islamic law, women are walking around like any beaches in Greece or Spain, whiskey is sold openly there and they are living exactly, in fact they are living in *better* conditions than their own countries.

500,000 Saudis have studied in the best universities of the West and have returned home, and *none* of them have any function in the running of their country! They are forced to do other types of businesses. They cannot get employment in the government, they cannot reform their own country, and they cannot demand accountability. There is not even a minister for finance who does book-keeping for the economy for what is coming in and out of the country! *All these* people are demanding reform. This has forced the Saudi regime to establish what they call

'Shura', which means a sort out parliament. Saudi women who cannot vote are also demanding their rights. People talk about the Taliban who are very brutal and anti-women, but they never speak about the condition of women in Saudi Arabia, they never speak about the condition of women in Kuwait, in Bahrain and so on.

Taka: More than that, not only do they not speak about this reform movement, they depict it as a movement that does not want to give women rights, that it is a movement in which women play no role. It is presented often as a militant Wahabbi movement. That's often as sophisticated as it gets in the newspapers. Would you agree that this is a big problem that there is a lack of analysis, let alone profound analysis to what's going on there?

MH: The jihadist movement in Saudi or in Egypt, despite the fact that they are taking their inspiration and ideology from Islamic thinking; it is basically a nationalist movement, a nationalist movement with an Islamic colour. Wahabbism is in fact a creation of British Imperialism itself; secondly the Wahabbis are in power. Wahabbism is the ideological wing of the regime in Saudi Arabia. They are exporting Wahabbism to destabilise progressive governments and movements in the Muslim countries. Wahabbism is the perfect ideological weapon against progressive, democratic and revolutionary movements. The nationalist movements in the Gulf States have nothing to do with Wahabbism, no; it is rather a democratic revolutionary movement, a nationalist movement which has a religious cover due to the situation in their countries. Of course Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country where Wahabbism has ruled for a very long time. Saudi is the place where the holiest shrine of Islam is, it is the most important place for the Islamic world. So their movement's mobilisation uses religion and nationalism combined to fight against imperialism and neo-colonialism.

It is a nationalist movement and you can see that they are attacking Western interests. When they attack expatriates they want them to leave, to make them panic and frighten them and away and to disturb the economy of the regime in so doing. They are not attacking them because they are whites or non-Muslims. Most of the expatriates are military people who train the Saudi state, armed forces and security companies. So the targets are military targets despite the fact that they are wearing civilian clothes, but they *are* military people who train the Saudi regime to maintain itself. It has nothing to do with Christianity, no, it's a nationalist movement.

Taka: Recently *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper ran a seven part interview with one of Osama bin Laden's bodyguards called 'Abu Jandal'. Maybe I misunderstood it, but I think Abu Jandal found it difficult to accept that post-1996 Osama bin Laden suggested that he make a critique of Wahabbism. Abu Jandal was formerly a pro-Saudi regime jihadist in Afghanistan; he found it difficult to accept that bin Laden said that you must re-study the role of Wahabbism in Saudi Arabia. What is your view on this?

MH: Wahabbism is the ideological wing of the Saudi regime. Wahabbism is the most reactionary and backward Islamic sect. It started in the 18th century of a person called Abdul ibn Wahab. He himself was killed by Mohammed Ali, he was hanged in Istanbul. Mohammed Ali at that time was the one who was ruling Egypt. Wahabbism is also an ideology which wants to split the Islamic community deeper and deeper. So the British and later the USA supported the rise of Wahabbism, and then vast amounts of oil were discovered there. Then Wahabbism became in the Cold War the best means to fight nationalist movements. For example, the Republican movement of Yemen which overthrew the feudal regime of Imam Yahyah in northern Yemen. Nasser was supporting this movement by sending military officers to help the new republic. The Wahabbis in Saudi Arabia with the means of the large amounts of money they have, used propaganda and

sabotage in Yemen utilising the backwardness there. It is the Wahabbi ideology and the oil money which brought the collapse of the Republic of North Yemen and also in the south of Yemen which was a very progressive and socialist country. It was destroyed by the Wahabbis. The Saudi family made an embargo against south Yemen trying to destroy its economy. They have played the same role in Somalia, Sudan and other countries.

By 1996 Osama was saying Wahabbism is a reactionary movement. At that time he was living in Sudan in Khartoum. At that moment he was having in depth discussions with Hassan al-Turabi. Turabi had probably convinced him that Wahabbism is the most reactionary sect. Al-Zwahir himself is not a Wahabbist. Zwahir is a nationalist using Islam. He is the most progressive in a sense that he combines three things; nationalism in a modern sense, Mao Tse Tung military technique of using Peoples War, and the third thing, he rejects the reactionary ideology of Wahabbism. He says that there is a power which is pulling the strings in Wahabbism. Zwahir says, the more we fight against them, the more their master will come and protect them and then the population will know who is really ruling them. So I can understand that Osama can change his opinion.

Taka: One can argue that post-1996, bin Laden's movement put itself on its head. Pre-1996, in the period of fighting the Soviets and the ruling party at that time, the Peoples Democratic Party in Afghanistan (PDPA), they were being financed by petro-dollars through the intelligence services and organisations in Pakistan and Saudi with the full support and backing of the USA and Britain ...

MH: Yes.

Taka: But post-1996 they turned this on its head ...

MH: Yes.

Taka: From being essentially a pro-federal, pro-imperialist movement, they turned this round into a movement directed *against* US Imperialism and their puppet regimes in the Arab nation and in the Islamic world generally ...

MH: Yes.

Taka: From the aforementioned interview with Osama's bodyguard, interestingly Abu Jandal states that there were many splits in the jihadi movements in Afghanistan on this issue. He states that Zwahir split with most of his comrades in Egyptian Islamic Jihad *on the issue* of fighting US Imperialism and their puppet regimes in the region. It can be argued that *this* is the most important starting place to analyse this movement known as al-Qaeda, or what was started in 1996 as the '*International Front Against Crusaders and Jews*'.

MH: For Zwahir I think the split occurred long time before when he was in prison. Once he was released from prison he had a very clear idea of what he wants and what he wants to do. That's why he called his movement 'jihadist'. When he says jihadist he means two things, in Islam there are two jihads, the greater jihad and the smaller jihad. The smaller jihad is to defend yourself when attacked, the bigger jihad is the struggle inside yourself.

He understood *very* clearly the mechanism and theory of imperialism. I would not be surprised that he studied Lenin for that matter, because his analysis of imperialism was very very clear. As a result of that, of his split, he was concentrating to infiltrate the Egyptian army. He utilised that infiltration and he killed one of the most important puppets of the US in the region, Sadat, the ruler of Egypt at the time, was killed by the jihadists. After that they went to prison and then after to Afghanistan.

According to Zwahir, they chose Afghanistan as a hiding place where they can train and can create more of a base and bring more young people to their ideas. At the time of Reagan in the US, at the time of his idea of the 'Evil Empire' in regards to the USSR, The Saudis and Wahabbists were in alliance with the US by pumping more oil in the world market to destroy the Soviet economy. The Soviets lost ten billion dollars every year because the price of oil reached ten dollars a barrel. This Saudi action at the behest of the US also attacked the Iranian economy and their revolution; also they have attacked countries such as Nigeria and Venezuela by pumping this amount of oil in the international market. At that time they subsidised the imperialist economies when the imperialists were facing severe

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crisis. Inside the imperialist countries in the eighties, the idea was to support the pro-Saudi *ulemas* [religious councils] here, to support the Imams.

It was possible in the eighties in Belgium to open a mosque easier and faster than it was to open a youth club. The Saudis have another tool, it's called the '*Rabayat Islamiya*', the International Islamic Organisation. This organisation is connected to the International Organisation of the Christian Democrats. They meet every year and they are both members of an organisation called the 'Anti-Communist League'. Rabayat Islamiya has cells and offices everywhere. The mosque in Brussels was built by Saudi money, it is very clear. They are also connected to the most right-wing Catholic organisations.

The idea was to recruit Islamic youth born in the West for the war in Afghanistan, *then* they were encouraging them to go and fight. They were not terrorists then, they were *good muhajideens*. They were promoted as such, invited to the White House. Now after 1996 Osama bin Laden stated that US troops should leave Saudi Arabia, even the Ottomans never brought their troops to the holy lands, second, he criticised the embargo against Iraq criticised the Saudis for their lack of support for the Palestinian *Intifada* and he raised the issue of Palestine.

The people who have supported Osama see injustice everywhere. They see the money from Saudi oil is not used for their national interests. The consciousness of the Saudi population had increased. So at that time the Saudis took away Osama's passport and deported him to Sudan. That was when al-Qaeda, meaning '*the base*' was started. *Then* they became terrorists.

Osama's movement tried to kill Mubarak of Egypt in Addis Ababa, and they were seen as the enemy as they were targeting the real enemy of the Arab and Muslim world. Now they are terrorists, yes. Terrorists from the perspective of imperialists and their puppets.

Taka: You have talked about a lot of interesting things which may broaden the study of this phenomenon. There is a severe lack of analysis on Zawahiri's role in al-Qaeda in the West. Most of the commentaries are focused on Osama bin Laden, very little is said on Zawahiri's role. Maybe it is easier to muddy the waters in the Saudi context due to the little amount of information from there, and there is a strong element of racism towards a movement which is still trying to overthrow feudalism, whereas this has been completed in the West for at least a century. Although Zawahiri if anyone at knows about him is seen as the number two leader in al-Qaeda. However, as you have said, and reading from his important work '*Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet*', he has played an equally important role to bin Laden in revolutionising this movement into one directed *against* imperialism. Of course Egypt is the biggest recipient of US military aid in the world and is, along with Saudi Arabia, the biggest bulwark against the Arab revolution. What are your views on this lack of focus on his role in the al-Qaeda leadership?

MH: I think there are two people who had a positive and negative influence on Osama. Osama before he met Zawahiri he met the Palestinian man Abdullah Azzam. Azzam is not a jihadist. You can say he is the *indirect* father of Hamas. As a Palestinian he had a very big influence on Osama. The way he reasoned was that the Palestinian issue was the most important issue in Islam and in the Arab world. He argued that any division amongst the Muslims will weaken the Palestinian issue. Therefore to turn things upside down against the Wahabbist regime would weaken the Palestinian issue. That's the way Azzam reasoned.

Azzam had a very big influence on Osama. When Zawahiri came he presented the issue like this; it is true the Palestinian issue is the most important, but the Palestinian issue is only a very small segment in comparison to the big issue. Zawahiri said that overthrowing the regime in Saudi Arabia will bring closer the liberation of Palestine.

Taka: This is very interesting because again and again you find Osama bin Laden and Zawahiri are putting on the Arab political agenda issues have not been put on the agenda which such force since the initial rise of the Nasserite, Baathist and Arab Nationalist Movement in the fifties and sixties. You can see that they are sweeping away the narrow nationalism that had dealt a deadly blow to the Arab revolution before. It has been left, funnily enough, to bin Laden and Zawahiri to raise these

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fundamental issues to the Arab Revolution firmly and forcefully on the agenda once again.

MH: The Pan-Arabists, whether the Baathists or Nasserites had an influence in the Saudi political situation in the fifties and the sixties. In 1953 there was the biggest Saudi demonstration of the Saudi working class. As a result of that several clandestine political parties came about. There were Nasserites, Baathists, Communists as well as even Maoists. The Nasserites even influenced sections of the royal family, creating a split in the Saudi royal family. The Nasserite trend was the strongest, then the Baathists and then the communists in the trade unions. They were all in an alliance. The Arab nationalists, anti-imperialists and communists didn't learn how to deal and unify against the big enemy in a front, in which I mean how to solve the contradiction amongst friends, and those with the enemy. Most of the time the smallest thing split them and brought them into collisions with each other.

When this movement came about in the fifties in Saudi, the ruling class kicked out all the Saudi workers and replaced them with foreign workers. They wanted to make sure that no Saudi workers would develop a political movement. They did not want to create the modern conditions which would then bring about a serious problem for them. Later on the education and political consciousness of the Saudi middle classes improved, and a national bourgeoisie developed that has given birth to Osama bin Laden and his movement.

Zawahiri also himself comes from an educated bourgeois background. His uncle was the first Arab League Secretary General, another one of his Uncles was the director of the world prestigious *al-Azhar Islamic Institution* in Egypt. So his family is a very educated and high bourgeois family. Zawahiri as a nationalist utilises Islam, and the most radical in the sense that he combats US Imperialism. He developed a strategy that was to influence Osama bin Laden. Osama bin Laden later accepted the political line of Zawahiri. Zawahiri is in fact the ideological father behind al-Qaeda. Osama is a symbol for Saudi Arabia and Zawahiri is a symbol for Egypt. Their idea is to have very prominent people from every part of the Arab nation, and promote them as into an umbrella organisation. In many Arab countries where there is no constitution, no democracy, the only way you can convey your message to the people is by taking the regimes ideology and saying ; you say you are Islamic but you have imperialist forces occupying here, you say you are this, but you are doing something else. You say you are Islamic, but you have no *Shura*, you have no constitution. Iran has a constitution as an Islamic Republic. In Iran women study, in Iran women can work in public places, in offices, in Iran even women join the police and the army. Why not in Saudi Arabia? So they are raising all these questions, and these demands have a big mass base. That is why I think the imperialist countries don't speak about Saudi Arabia. It will frighten their economies into panic.

Taka: We have to expect that silence or propaganda from the imperialists, but as leftists it is worrying to see the leftists dire understanding towards this movement. Of course it is made difficult if working people in London are attacked, and it is absolutely right that we come to the defence of these working people for example on the bus from the some of the poorest working class areas of north east London. The left must defend these people; nevertheless there is an urgent need to understand the political nature so that we can have peace between the peoples. After the attacks on the World Trade Centre, the Pentagon and White House on September the 11th, after Madrid and now after London there has been a barrage of rhetoric from many leftists that is using the same terminology as Tony Blair, of course with a left sounding discourse, saying that the kamikaze attackers are 'barbarians', they are trying to destroy our society. What are your thoughts on this?

MH: I think the best answer is the result of the election of the Spanish people. Normally when such kinds of terrorist attacks take place the reaction is that the people and the government become united. But the Spanish people proved that they didn't unite with the government, they voted for another government on the condition that Spanish troops were withdrawn and brought home from Iraq. So this is a very good lesson that the anger of the Spanish people and their wise ness and sophistication. In fact they saw the war as illegal and unilateral aggression against Iraq by the US and Britain.

In Great Britain, despite of the agony of the London attack, the people and the left movement there have to understand one thing and educate themselves that this war was brought from Baghdad to London because of Tony Blair. A man who is a liar, who lied to the British people. It has been proved that he lied about everything so why should believe him now? He is not accountable to his own people; he is no different from the dictators of the Third World. He is an elected dictator himself! He is using the British youth as cannon fodder in Iraq; many of these young soldiers are suffering from psychological problems. Most of them are from working class families, it's not Tony Blair's children who are going to fight in the war or those of the upper classes.

If some young Muslims from a working class background face racism, who see that their identity, their personality, their Islam being attacked day and night. They see a Muslim country like Iraq illegally destroyed. They have seen how Afghanistan was bombarded and how they destroyed that country on a very fake pretext, and if they themselves decided to do what they did, I can understand that. The Irish also, when they wanted to fight for their independence, they did a lot of bombing in London and in Britain. I am not endorsing this, but I can understand that, and as I have mentioned the British Anglican and Catholic Church were much wiser than the left movement. They put the point clearly, they said this was is an unjust war and it will divide our multi-national and multicultural society, it will create divisions, a Bantustan situation and bring a serious war into Britain. And they were right; it is a correct and far sighted analysis from the church leaders.

The trade unionists and left movement has to go deep into the water and find out what the problems the youth in Britain are facing. Why are these youth who have been born there and brought up there ... First of all it is very clear to me that they are telling us that British born Muslim youths are being recruited by al-Qaeda! This means that *your* education has failed, *your system* failed. How can someone from outside from another education system recruit British Muslim youth into al-Qaeda in front of the noses of the British state?! There must a serious problem in the community. The British *system* led them to be recruited into al-Qaeda if this is the case. For me it is a normal reaction considering the situation, it will happen more.

The last important thing I would like to say is that time is over when you can go ten thousand kilometres away and you can bomb and kill and eliminate people and still remain safe in the centre. In one of the speeches by Ho Chi Minh he stated that between 1886 and 1911 over 8 million Congolese were killed by the colonialists. There was no reaction and no one was punished for that, but now I think it is not like before, you cannot go and bomb outside. The retaliation of those who have been bombed will come back to the centre. The situation has changed. 11th September proves this, so does Madrid and now London and even other ones will prove this.

The British people have a greater responsibility to who to vote for and what kind of world they need. They cannot live peacefully while their leaders are waging war everywhere and killing innocent people while they can live and travel peacefully. It's not possible. I think the left has to understand that and explain to their population. We are not in the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884 of colonising the world, we are not in the 1920s, we are in 2005. The last fifty years has changed dramatically the consciousness of the Third World peoples, and I think one of the results is that if you touch me, well ...terrorism is always the weapon of the weak.

On Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq

Che-Leila: If we can touch upon the situation in Afghanistan. Recently the Afghan forces wanting to liberate their country from the imperialist occupation have increased the number of attacks, the successfulness of their attack...

MH: Yes.

Taka: These are organisations linked to the Taliban. But also there seems to be developing a wider national liberation movement than just the Taliban.

MH: The resistance in Afghanistan is a combination of the old Taliban and the old muhajideen and nationalist elements.

Taka: There are nationalist elements too?

MH: Yes, they are *all* based on nationalism. It has nothing to do now with bringing the Taliban back to power.

Taka: It has even been reported in the imperialist press that nationalist elements aside from the Taliban are fighting. There was even a prison escape by two communists recently there.

MH: Yes. There are nationalist elements, even old Maoists are involved in all this. Of course the press doesn't make a serious analysis of Afghanistan. What happened is that after they have overthrown the Taliban, exactly as in Iraq they came to occupy the country with their protégés. On the one side they have the Tajiks – Masud, on the other side they have the small group around Dostum and they also have Heart of Ismail Khan. They are all war lords. The Tajiks, Ismail Khan of Heart and Dostum, they survived all this time while the Taliban controlled over eighty percent of the country, they survived by the logistic and financial support of Iran and Russia. Just after the Taliban took over Kabul they killed six Iranian diplomats. The Iranians believed that the Taliban were influenced by the Wahabbists. Osama and Zwahiri was not there when the Taliban took power, he came later so you cannot connect him to them at that time. Anyway, the Iranians and the Russians to keep the balance in the country they subsidised these three warlords.

After September 11th, when the US was bombarding the country they utilised these three warlords by giving them weapons with the indirect support of Russia. US said especially to the Masud group, not to march on Kabul, but they did and killed all the people they wanted to by saying they are all Taliban. You might remember that massacre. This shifted the balance of power in the country. All these groups, aside from the Taliban, they are minorities in the country and they cannot rule as a minority in power in Kabul while there is no serious participation of the majority Pashtun who make up more than fifty percent of the country's population. So the Pashtuns were not represented, and the US put in their puppet Karzai and others into power who have no serious mass base.

The first conflict started with the old King in Italy when he established his *loya jirga*, the *shura*, which means a parliament. The King wanted to be a candidate for the Afghan presidency. The US intervened with their ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, who is now their man in Iraq, a special envoy for the US who is of Afghani Pashtun origin. So what made all the other groups unify is the marginalisation of the Pashtuns. Secondly the Pashtuns want an *independent* Afghanistan, they don't want to be dependent on any imperialist country, at least independent in a visible sense. All the forces who were marginalized are now joining the resistance.

Afghani people have a good quality of resistance. Their resistance character and sense of independence is very strong. They have also had a lot of experience in resistance. They have had the Soviet experience and then the civil war. They can fight easily, and have the weapons and experience. I don't think the Taliban alone are fighting, the local religious chiefs and tribal chiefs are involved too. The way the US Imperialist soldiers are behaving in the country has itself contributed to a lot of frustration along the masses. The resistance can even develop into a nation wide resistance gradually. Maybe others will join.

Taka: Would you agree that the Pakistani ruling class is split on the issue of Afghanistan?

MH: Yes, because Pakistan has interests in Afghanistan for two reasons. At the time of the rule of the Afghani king, he was very close to the Soviet Union at one time, having a independent foreign policy. This frightened the Pakistanis for the reason that Durrand line which splits the Pashtuns between Paksitan and Afghanistan, Afganistan was claiming the land on the Pakistani side. This si the reasons that the Pashun Ayub Khan came to power in Pakistan. For the first time a Pashtun was brought to power in order to stop the secessionist movement of the Pashtun people in north west Pakistan. The Pakistani General who was killed, Zia ul Haq, had utilised a lot of Pashtuns in the intelligence services and army. In the time of the Afghan war the Pashtuns were masivelt represented in the Pakistani army. Now the Pakistani state has to repress the Pashtuns because of their support for the resistance in Afghani-
stan which is creating major headaches for the Pakistani state.

Taka: In your opinion, does this situation present opportunities to a revolutionary movement in Pakistan?

MH: There are opportunities there! I think the Pakistani bourgeoisie is split. One side says that we have to crush the Pashuns and support the US puppets, which is the dominant line of Musharraf. The other side states that it is not in the Pakistani national interest, and we have nothing to gain from this, so it is better that US Imperialism is defeated and let us support the national liberation movement. I think it is not only the religious sections in Pakistan who are taking this line, but also the secular, liberal and upper classes. I think these sections are supporting the resistance with supplies and money, otherwise the reisstance would not have been as successful as they are.

Taka: On the subject of Iraq; Iraq is a beacon of advanced revolutionary struggle in the Arab world. So may I ask your general views on what is happening in Iraq? Our news is full of black propaganda as to what is going on there, assigning all these anti-people attacks to the Iraqi National Resistance whereas the resistance has made it very clear that this is mostly the work of the US together with Mossad elements, reactionary Kurdish and Shia elements. This is *never* stated in the imperialist press. I wanted to ask particularly about the role of the Baath party in the resistance, who seem to be the main part of the resistance in Iraq

MH: Yes.

Taka: What has been the historical role of the Iraqi Baath in the resistance there?

MH: You see the Baath Party and the Government of Iraq made a thorough-going assessment after the war in 1991. I have some of the documents that the central committee of the Baath were making. They said they were reached the 1991 war with a settlement, but now the second war is starting. This second war is to weaken the Iraqi nation further,

they will isolate us through an embargo, secondly they were try and use covert actions to topple the government, thirdly they have *illegally* divided the country into three through the 'no fly zones' of the southern and northern parts of the country. This division by the US and British Imperialists with the no fly zones is the same areas between which they want to create divisions, a federal Iraq. The Baath discussed what their options were and anticipated a number of things. They said, suppose we foil all the internal provocations and we might even slowly break our isolation against the embargo and build again our relationships with the international community; what will the be the response of the US and British Imperialists? And their answer was: *they will invade us! They will come militarily, they is no other option for them, they will try and overthrow us.*

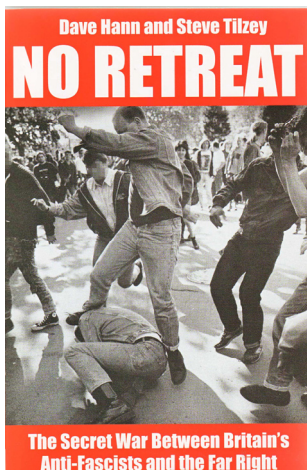
Taka: What is your evidence for this?

MH: The Baath journal *itself* published this at the time! *Al-Baath and al-Thawra* [meaning *Revolution*] of which Tariq Aziz was the editor. They knew what was to come. So then they discussed what their options were. Can we defend ourselves, can we fight? They said yes, but not fighting in a classical sense, the US are too strong. Not only that, the Baath analysed the political conditions in the region. They said that if we succeed breaking the embargo and the regional situation does not change, the invasion will be easy as most of the countries in the region will support the invasion despite the fact that their populations will be against it. They were thinking specifically about Saudi Arabia, Kuwait etc. Of course they didn't come through Saudi to invade Iraq, but the Saudis supported the US and Britain through oil, and the US used Qatar and Kuwait.

What they didn't anticipate was that the days of Hafez al-Assad of Syria would come to an end. The days of his son, Bashar al-Assad, brought a new chance for rapprochement between Iraq and Syria. For the first time the two ruling Baath parties of Syria and Iraq, and the two states met as friendly states. They opened their common border, trade started to flourish between the two countries. Their two respective cabinets were meeting every six months in joint ministerial meetings and then the oil pipeline which was closed before was reopened. Iraq was selling one hundred thousand barrel a day to the Syrians.

Turkey lost out from the 1991 war against Iraq. They were promised assistance if they supported the US in attacking Iraq. But Turkey experienced a lot of economic crisis. Turkey reasoned that they have been cheated, that their interests have not been furthered. They decided to establish relations with Baathist Iraq after the 1991 war and refused to comply with the embargo against Iraq. In 1996 Iraq captured the capital Irbil of Kurdistan and they killed most of the CIA agents and US and British covert action people there. Iraq then became stable. As a reaction to that Clinton had no other option but to bombard Iraq.

**** READ NO RETREAT: THE SECRET WAR BETWEEN BRITAIN'S ANTI FASCISTS AND THE FAR RIGHT ** READ NO RETREAT: THE SECRET WAR BETWEEN BRITAIN'S**



IN THE LATE 1970'S, RASCISM WAS ON THE MARCH. THE BOOTBOYS AND SKINHEADS OF THE NATIONAL FRONT AND THE BRITISH MOVEMENT PARADED THEIR EXTREMIST VIEWS AND TARGETED ETHNIC MINORITIES AND POLITICAL OPPONENTS - UNTIL A GROUP OF WORKING-CLASS, LEFT-WING ACTIVISTS DECIDED TO FIGHT BACK. THEY VOWED TO DRIVE THE NAZIS OFF THE STREETS NOT WITH PLACARDS AND SPEECHES BUT BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

**** READ NO RETREAT: THE SECRET WAR BETWEEN BRITAIN'S ANTI FASCISTS AND THE FAR RIGHT ** READ NO RETREAT: THE SECRET WAR BETWEEN BRITAIN'S**

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY?

DANIEL OXBROOK

Make Poverty History: force for change or cynical Blairite propaganda ploy?

Until the London bombers blasted it out of the news for good, there was a lot of excitement in the media about the Make Poverty History campaign, the G8 summit, and Bob Geldof's Live-8 concert.

Make Poverty History was set up by a coalition comprising Oxfam, Save the Children, Action Aid and other NGOs as well as the Church of England and various Trade Unions, and is supported by a total of around 300 different organisations.

It is a political campaign as it is calling for policy changes rather than simply charity. To this extent, it reflects something progressive in our society: it shows that people are beginning to understand that the imperialist countries bear the responsibility for the horrific poverty in our society which kills 30,000 people every day - and not only because they are stingy with their aid, but because they have set up a system that keeps things that way.

Quoting from their "Campaigners Guide to Edinburgh 2 July 2005", the three demands of the Campaign are:

"1) Trade Justice. Make Poverty History are calling on the G8 to

*Call for trade rules that ensure governments can choose the best solution to end poverty. This will not always mean free trade.

*End export subsidies that damage the livelihoods of poor communities around the world.

*Make laws to stop big business profiting at the expense of people and the environment

2) Drop the Debt. Make Poverty History is calling on the G8 to

*Ensure that the unpayable debts of the world's poorest countries are cancelled in full, without harming aid budgets to meet any costs.

*Stop forcing poor countries to follow particular policies in return for debt cancellation.

*Agree to a just and transparent system for handling debt problems which takes account of poor countries needs and views and not just those of the creditors. "

3) More and Better Aid. Make Poverty History is calling on the G8 to:

*Set a binding deadline for spending 0.7% of national income on aid.

*Ensure that aid supports poor communities' own plans for fighting poverty. It shouldn't come with conditions attached that require countries to adopt particular policies, such as opening their markets to imports and privatising vital services, such as water

*See that at least 70% of aid goes to the very poorest countries by 2010.

*Commit to giving a certain amount of aid over a set period of time, so that countries can make long term plans.

*Stop tying aid to the purchase of goods and services from donor countries"

As a wish list, these demands are pretty good. Cuba, through its seat

in the UN, has been consistently calling for most of these things for years. On the issues of trade justice, third world countries have been increasingly joining together at forums such as the UN and the WTO, to try and force the West to end the most harmful of its practices. Therefore, in many ways it is the third world countries themselves that have come up with these demands and have already started fighting for them. The fact that they are now being backed by a sizable constituency in the imperialist heartlands is definitely a positive step.

However, some of the Make Poverty History demands are too vague. "Make laws to stop big business profiting at the expense of people and the environment", for example. How does business, big or small, make any profit, except by exploiting people? Profits come from having people working for you - adding more value to the materials they started with than they are being paid. That is what exploitation, economically speaking, is, and that is the source of all profits. So are they calling for abolition of private business altogether, for a socialist society? I doubt it. They are just being vague! Any government can claim to have such laws, therefore it is imperative for any campaign to explain precisely what laws they mean.

Nevertheless, some of the demands are pretty specific. Not just more aid is demanded, but they specifically call for an end to the practice of giving aid only when the recipient agrees to adopt certain policies. This is good. Again, however, we have to look at what this would mean in practice. Aid is an instrument of policy - that is its purpose in capitalist societies. Except for a tiny, tokenistic fraction, the aid budget in general is a tool to bribe third world countries. That is why governments like Britain's give aid in the first place. Asking them to give aid and not demand anything in return is like asking a leopard to change its spots. Make Poverty History know that is how the aid budget is used - they give examples themselves - but the problem is that they imagine, under capitalism, it could be otherwise. This initial misunderstanding makes them prone to manipulation. For example, at a public meeting of the Campaign which I attended, one of their campaigners said from the platform that, thanks to their pressure, the demand to make aid unconditional had now been won! He said they had secured an agreement from the British government that they would no longer have any conditions (such as privatising industry or opening markets) attached to British foreign aid. .

It is good that the government felt pressured into publicly stating it would not attach conditions to aid. However, it doesn't take a genius to work out that formal abolition of conditions may mean very little in practice. If British and Indian government negotiators are at a meeting together discussing opportunities for British business in India, with British aid to India as the next item on the agenda, no threats or explicit bribes have to be made! The Indian diplomat knows that the aid forthcoming from Britain will reflect how much he is willing to do for British business. He doesn't need to be told explicitly. And there is no way Make Poverty History or anyone else can prove any ties between the two 'separate' agenda items. So that initial misunderstanding on the part of the Campaign, partly driven by the desire to seem effective, has meant that they have allowed themselves to be party to the British government presenting itself as progressive and willing to make changes, when in fact the concrete changes are likely to be minimal.

The Campaign have allowed themselves to be subtly manipulated by the British government in other ways too. Gordon Brown, the British Chancellor, has publicly said that he supports the demands of the campaign! The correct response to this would have been to point out that Britain is in the vanguard of forcing third world countries to open up their markets to foreign competition, and that what this means in practice is throwing millions into unemployment and therefore poverty, so Mr Brown is just being a liar and hypocrite if he claims to support the campaign. By not making such a statement, the Campaign has again allowed itself to

LIVE AID



LIVE AMMO



be part of a British government propaganda stunt.

When Gordon Brown started putting it about that he had eliminated "100%" of debt from the 18 most impoverished countries in Africa, however, this proved too much for the Campaign. "What is being discussed is emphatically not 100% debt cancellation for the world's poorest countries, but government spokespeople continue to state or imply that it is" wrote an exasperated Richard Bennett, Make Poverty History chairman, in a letter to Gordon Brown. The deal had in fact not included debts owed to the private sector - the bulk of the debts in many cases. But by then it was too late - the campaign had already allowed Brown to present himself as a saviour, and even almost as a representative of the Campaign, and his announcement got infinitely more coverage than Bennett's protest.

We also have to see the British government's manoeuvrings in the light of its relationship to the US and to the rest of Europe. Blair has managed to switch the focus of the G8's talks on poverty from the whole third world to Africa alone. Whilst it is true that Africa does suffer from the most extreme poverty, this focus is also partly due to his role as a representative of US interests (his whole foreign policy having always been about getting close to the US in every way possible). US institutions do not mind too much about discussing writing off some of Africa's debts. This is because most African debts are owed to French and German institutions! Third World debts owed to the US are mainly owed by Latin American countries - which, of course, Blair has kept quiet about.

Another point: everyone I know with origins in any third world country has found the campaign to some extent patronising and ineffectual. This is largely to do with the endless parade of smirking celebrities "doing their bit" before getting back to the real business of snorting coke and pissing their cut of humanity's wealth up the wall with high class prostitutes. In some ways it seems little more than a barely updated take on the "White Man's Burden" liberal imperialism of 100 years ago; a propaganda exercise to portray Blair and Brown as saviours and divert attention from their escapades in Iraq. This was not the intention of the founders of the campaign, but it has to a certain extent been the result.

My final point is that this result was almost inevitable given what the campaign did not say anything about, which is the link between poverty and western military force.

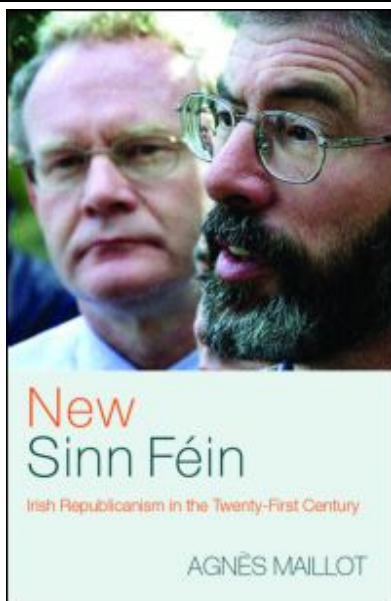
Third world countries should not need to be saved from poverty by rich politicians & pop stars. Why don't poor countries simply refuse to pay the so-called 'debts', which have been paid off many times over already? Why don't they use their natural & human resources to develop their economies to the benefit of their people instead? The truth is, many third world countries have & do take this path, but are always subjected to an onslaught - political & economic to begin with, but military as a last resort - from western governments, banks & corporations. The economic world order which the campaign is objecting to - the unfair trade, the so-called 'debt' - is not accepted voluntarily by the peoples of the third world - it is forced on them.

AT A TIME WHEN BLAIR IS POSING AS THE SAVIOUR OF AFRICA, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT HIS DESIGNS FOR AFRICA ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM HIS DESIGNS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST - TO ENSURE THAT THEIR RESOURCES ARE USED TO BENEFIT THE CORPORATIONS AND BANKERS HE REPRESENTS, & NOT THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE THERE. HE HAS SHOWN US HE IS PREPARED TO SLAUGHTER THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS IN ORDER TO KEEP POVERTY A VERY REAL CONDITION FOR HALF THE WORLD. LET'S NOT BE FOOLED BY HIS CURRENT POSTURING.

The last 60 years are littered with examples. On over 50 occasions, the West has invaded third world countries that have tried to use their resources to benefit their own people rather than Western banks & businesses. If you include Western governmental support for coups, assassinations & so on, the figure rises to over 400. The truth is that, much as the British establishment love to go on about 'corrupt African leaders', they prefer corrupt leaders, as they are easier to do business with. Nicaragua, the Congo, Vietnam, Grenada, Angola, Chile - all of these places have been attacked by the US, or US-trained armies, because they tried to make poverty history for their people. If you want more recent examples, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq were all attacked because in one way or another, they stepped outside the world economic order. Just look at the devastation caused, & their current rulers, & it is clear that improving the lives of the people there was clearly not the intention of these invasions.

At a time when Blair is posing as the saviour of Africa, it is important to remember that his designs for Africa are no different from his designs for the Middle East - to ensure that their resources are used to benefit the corporations and bankers he represents, & not the people who live there. He has shown us he is prepared to slaughter thousands upon thousands in order to keep poverty a very real condition for half the world. Let's not be fooled by his current posturing. If we really want to make poverty history, we need to be ready to oppose the military actions which enforce it.

**** READ NEW SINN FEIN: IRISH REPUBLICANISM IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY ** READ NEW SINN FEIN: IRISH REPUBLICANISM IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY**



SINN FEIN IS A UNIQUE POLITICAL PARTY, NOT ONLY WITHIN IRISH POLITICS, BUT ALSO WITHIN THE WIDER EUROPEAN CONTEXT. IT BOASTS A LONG REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION, A HISTORICAL AFFILIATION WITH AN ARMED GROUP, A SOCIAL RADICALISM AND A VISION OF SOCIETY THAT HAS INSPIRED OTHER PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

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RADICAL BASQUE YOUTH MOVEMENTS

TAKEN FROM AN PHOBLACHT/REPUBLICAN NEWS



Sinn Féin councillor for North Belfast, Eoin Ó Broin, made his publishing debut last week. After several years of research, *Matxinada, Basque Nationalism and Radical Basque Youth Movements*, was launched at the *Cultúr-lann*, on Belfast's Falls Road. The 300-page book, published by Left Republican Books, is the first work to chart both the country's youth movements and the last 30 years of conflict. To a packed audience, Queens Sociology lecturer Bill Rolston introduced a short video demonstrating some of the activities detailed in the book. This was followed

by a reading from the book by Ó Broin.

Speaking at the launch, the author said: "Despite being the site of the last remaining armed conflict in Europe, little is known about the Basque Country, its people and its struggle for independence. Moreover, the last 30 years have seen the emergence of a vibrant and radical youth culture at a time when young people across Europe are turning away from politics." O'Broin's book sets out to provide the reader with an introduction to Basque nationalism and a chronology of the last 30 years of conflict between the Basques and the Spanish and French states. It also provides the first history of the various organisations and expressions which constitute the contemporary radical Basque youth movements. Following the Belfast launch last week, *Matxinada* will be launched in Dublin on Thursday 18 August at 7pm in Connolly Books. Launches will also take place in Derry, Galway, the Basque Country, and Scotland in the coming weeks.

Matxinada, Basque Nationalism and Radical Basque Youth Movements, can be bought at the Sinn Féin bookshops in Belfast and Dublin or at other good bookstores. The book costs £10 or \$15.

Interview with Eoin Ó Broin

An Phoblacht: When and why did you decide to write

a book about the Basque country and its youth movements.

Eoin Ó Broin: During 1997 and 1998 I was the National Organiser for Sinn Féin Youth. At that time we were developing a number of international relationships with youth groups in England, Wales, South Africa, Catalonia and the Basque Country. The strongest and most interesting youth movements were in the Basque Country and particularly an organisation called Jarrai (To Continue). It seemed to me that they understood that in order to mobilise large numbers of young people, you had to take a youth-centred approach. In fact, they were mobilising thousands and thousands of young people, through a very effective mix of radical politics and popular culture.

After several visits to the Basque Country I realised that in fact Jarrai was just part of a much broader and diverse youth culture, involving networks of illegal radio stations, youth houses, rock bands, campaign groups, language groups and students. So around 1999, I decided to write a short pamphlet about all of this, to make people in Ireland aware of the radical Basque youth movements. However, after a while I realised that a bigger book was needed, in order to provide the reader with a history of Basque nationalism and an account of the present conflict with the Spanish and French states.

AP: So *Matxinada* is about more than the youth movements?

EÓB: Yes, while the primary focus is on the youth movement, I thought

that it was important to provide the reader with a political and historical context in which to understand developments in youth culture. I also felt that while there is a lot of solidarity with the Basque struggle among Irish republicans, a lot of it is not based in any detailed understanding of the situation. This is primarily because there is a lack of reliable information on what is happening there. So about half of the book is devoted to the general situation.

There is a short introduction discussing existing literature and journalism on the Basque Country. There is a history of Basque nationalism from the end of the 19th century through to the death of Franco. The longest of the general chapters is an account of the conflict from about 1976 through the Socialists' period in power and covering the government of Aznar right through to 2003.

AP: Is this the first book to deal with this subject and period?

EÓB: Yes, in fact it is. Nobody has written about the youth movements at all, not even in Basque or Spanish, which is rather strange. Given the drift by young people away from politics right across Europe, you would think that someone would be interested in the Basque situation as an anomaly. I also think that it is very strange that no standard account of the recent conflict exists in English. If you go into any bookstore you will see a lot of introductions to the Palestine/Israel conflict, or indeed to the situation in the North of Ireland, but nothing on the Basque Country. So *Matxinada* is the first book to write about the youth movements and the first English account of political developments from 1976 to 2003.

AP: How have you separated your own political views from those in the book?

EÓB: I haven't. I think it's very important that this book is written from a standpoint of solidarity with the Basque independence movement and the radical youth movement. I make this very clear from the very beginning of the book and make no apologies for that. Most books have biases or take political sides in one way or another. For me, the question is just to be honest about where you position yourself. Having said that, I have tried to make sure that a wide range of political actors are quoted from the left and right of the Basque spectrum to the left and right of the Spanish state. The analysis is one which most radical left nationalists would agree with, but that doesn't mean that I exclude voices from other political positions.

I have also tried to present information which you would never find anywhere else, especially about state violence and repression, or the question of political prisoners. So *Matxinada* is neither an objective nor an academic book, it is a book written by a political activist about other political activists.

AP: So what have been your sources of information?

EÓB: I have relied on three main sources of information. Firstly, a small but valuable amount of historical research by specialist historians of Basque affairs. Secondly, lot of primary source material such as newspapers, reports, magazines, etc. And thirdly, I carried out about 30 interviews with spokespersons for a wide number of organisations and campaigns in September and October 1999. These interviews form the basis of the two chapters on the youth movements.

AP: I understand that some of these activists have been arrested since 1999?

EÓB: Yes, that's correct. 15 of the 30 interviewees have been arrested since 1999. Of these, about ten are still in jail, awaiting trial, while the others have been released on bail and are also awaiting trial.

The charges against these young people are really incredible. They are political activists like myself, but they are being accused of a whole assortment of things, primarily around the question of 'supporting an armed organisation'. However, their real 'offence' is to be politically active in the radical youth movements.

The strength of these movements is scaring the Spanish government, to the extent that since 1999, they have enacted three sets of laws primarily aimed at intimidating young people away from radical political activism. Most have spent between one and two years in jail. In effect this is a form of internment without trial, although in a more select form.

Organisations such as Jarrai are being banned, their national executives jailed. A new organisation springs up in its place (such as Haika), which in turn is banned and their new national executive is arrested.

This has happened three times, with Segi the most recent victim. Despite all of this repression, however, Segi continues to organise and mobilise; it's quite incredible actually.

AP: The book also deals with recent events?

EÓB: Yes, there is a chapter that goes from 1976 through to this year. It traces the political life of Spain after the death of Franco and the rise to power of the socialist administration of Filipe Gonzalez.

These were very bad years for the Basque Country, particularly because of the state-sponsored murder gang GAL. However, much of this chapter focuses on the consequences of the rise to power of the right after 1996. The present government of Jose Maria Aznar has unleashed a wave of repression since 1997, starting with the imprisonment of the national executive of Herri Batasuna and the closure of the daily newspaper Egin in 1997 and 1998.

More recently he has overseen the closure of the Basque language daily newspaper Egunkarria and the illegalisation of Batasuna. This year's local elections, held a few months ago, were the first to take place since the death of the dictator which saw a political party banned. There have also been a large number of political demonstrations banned, under the most spurious grounds. In fact, last weekend saw the first State of Exception declared (for 30 minutes) since the mid 1970s. A State of Exception means that it is illegal to congregate in groups of more than two people. And this measure was taken to prevent a peaceful demonstration against the illegalisation of Batasuna.

The more you think about it, the more incredible it is that at the start of the 21st century, in the European Union, a member state can erode the most basic civil liberties without a sound from the international community. The right to free speech is gone. The right to freedom of assembly is gone. The right to vote is effectively gone. It's frightening and has serious implications for us all. If one EU member state can do this, then so can the rest.

AP: How do you see the political situation in the Basque Country developing in the coming period?

EÓB: It's hard not to be pessimistic at the moment. This autumn will see the beginning of what is known as the Macro Sumario, which is the large legal case against a number of political organisations. That will be followed by a slightly smaller set of proceedings against the various youth organisations that have been banned. These trials will last for a while and could see a large number of political activists receive large jail sentences.

In addition, the newspaper Gara, which replaced Egin after it was closed, is beginning to attract the attention of the Spanish authorities and some of its staff fear the worst. With no political party, no newspaper, no youth organisations, what the Spanish government are doing is closing all of the political means of expression and organisation that the left nationalism movement has at its disposal. This can only lead to more confrontation with the state and greater levels of violence.

I really think that the next number of years will be very hard ones in the Basque Country. There will be a lot of arrests, more torture, more legal sanctions and in turn more violence. It is almost inevitable.

AP: So the Basques need support more than ever?

EÓB: There is no doubt about it. In some ways, it is a little like Ireland during the early 1980s. Aznar's government is like Thatcher's in that regard - solely focused on repression and more repression.

If the political situation is going to change at all, then there needs to be more international pressure exposing the reactionary ways in which Aznar and his allies in the Spanish judicial system are dragging the Basque Country and indeed Spain into deeper cycles of conflict. There

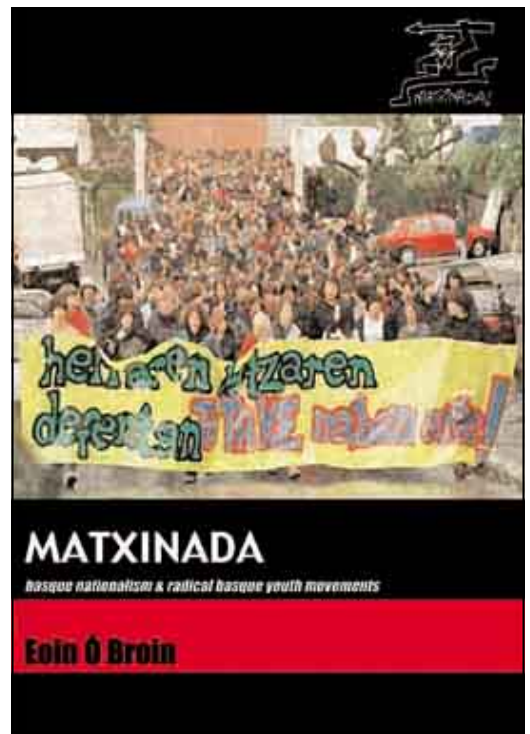
needs to be a realisation that what is going on in the Basque Country has implications for us all. So the Basques need our solidarity more than ever. There is a determined effort in the international community to isolate and criminalise Batasuna and the political expression of left nationalism. Sinn Féin can play an important role in making sure that that doesn't happen. Irish republicans must continue to hold to the belief that exclusion, criminalisation and censorship are not acceptable, and in its place we must promote dialogue and respect for civil and human rights for all people.

AP: Finally, what do you hope your book achieves?

EÓB: There are two things really. Firstly, I hope that it enables people to understand the situation in the Basque Country a little better. Like I have said, solidarity can sometimes be based on romantic ideas, not reality, but it is important that when we support a people in struggle it is on the basis of the facts. Secondly, I think that all struggles have something to learn from others. And we have a lot to learn from the Basques, particularly in terms of their radical youth culture. These objectives might be a little grand, but if even in a small way people learn a little, then the book will have been worthwhile.

AP: One final question, what does Matxinada mean?

EÓB: You will have to read the book to find out.

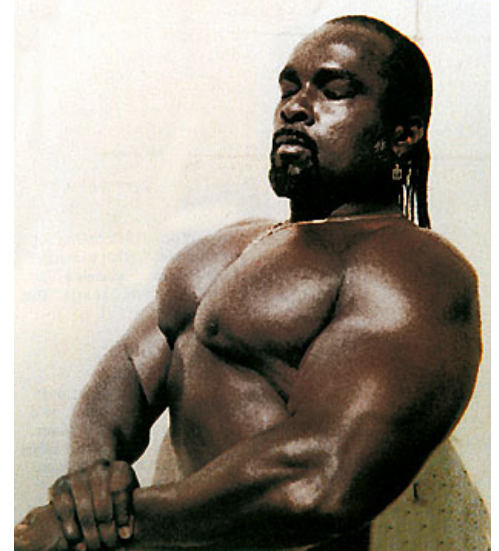


**** READ REDEMPTION: THE STORY OF STANLEY TOOKIE WILLIAMS' PATH FROM FEARED GANG LEADER TO BLACK REVOLUTIONARY ON DEATH ROW**



“LIKE MANY OTHERS I BECAME A SLAVE TO THE DELUSION OF CAPITALISM’S FALSE HOPE: A SLAVE TO DYSEDUCATION; A SLAVE TO NIHILISM; A SLAVE TO DRUGS; A SLAVE TO BLACK ON BLACK VIOLENCE; AND A SLAVE TO SELF HATE”

**STANLEY TOOKIE WILLIAMS
Author “REDEMPTION”**



**** READ REDEMPTION: THE STORY OF STANLEY TOOKIE WILLIAMS' PATH FROM FEARED GANG LEADER TO BLACK REVOLUTIONARY ON DEATH ROW**

NOTES ON THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

BY ROBERTO JORQUERA – VENEZUELA SOLIDARITY

These comments are my observations of the revolutionary process in Venezuela during my time here as Green Left Weekly correspondent since late March. Much of my time has also involved traveling throughout Venezuela to help organize the first solidarity brigade from Australia. Some comments are general, some are responses to particular questions asked by activists in Australia.

Revolutionary Democracy

The Bolivarian revolution, as the Venezuelan process of change is known, has taken a dramatic turn over the last six months. The political discussion on a local and national level has moved clearly in a socialist direction. The solutions posed by Chavez and the masses are increasingly of a socialist nature. During his speech on May Day this year, Chavez made it clear that to implement the Bolivarian Constitution (adopted following Chavez's election in 1998 after a wide process of consultation, and which establishes broad principles of social justice) the process had to break from capitalism. At the international solidarity conference held in Caracas in April, Chavez also said that he had given a lot of thought about what alternative there was to capitalism, such as a third way between capitalism and socialism, but had become convinced that socialism was the only alternative for those struggling against the barbarism of imperialism. In all public discussions, Chavez raises the issue of a new socialism for the 21st Century.

The two national pro-government TV stations run programs throughout the day that discuss the question of what Chavez has termed a process of building a "revolutionary democracy." The National Electoral Council runs advertisements on television about the "evolving democracy" being developed. Numerous televised open table discussions are being held on what socialism means for Venezuela. Local Bolivarian Houses, Endogenous Battle Units (UBE), and cultural centers regularly discuss the construction of Venezuelan socialism - how to construct socialism according to local conditions.

This process is not just rhetorical. Chavez, whose role as the undisputed leader for the process is reminiscent of the role played by Fidel Castro during the early years of the Cuban Revolution, has not backed away from directly attacking the private sector. Over the last month, Chavez has condemned big business for not producing enough, calling on them to hand over management to the workers. There is increasing discussion about nationalization of industry that is not being used properly, that is being sabotaged or not producing enough. Chavez, if not always all government authorities, has supported peasants when they have used their constitutional right to take over unused productive land. Chavez has called on all foreign companies to pay their taxes or leave Venezuela. Businesses are increasingly forced to pay the minimum wage or face heavy fines. On a state level there is also a large campaign to combat government bureaucracy. Of particular importance has been the campaign within the state oil company, PDVSA. Over the last month there has been a campaign by the opposition, especially through the opposition-controlled private media, to discredit PDVSA, based on allegations that the oil industry is in crisis with low production and high levels of corruption and inefficiency. The government has responded by exposing those sections of PDVSA that have been responsible for sabotage and corruption. The government has launched campaign, Black Gold, to combat these issues within PDVSA. A large part of the campaign is to increasingly tie sections of the armed forces to PDVSA, so as to keep a better eye on this resource. A similar mechanism was used by the Cuban Revolution in the early years when they assigned sections of the rebel army to oversee sections of industry so as to avoid sabotage and corruption.

Debates within the Chavez forces

There is no doubt that the Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR) has become the mass party of the revolution with well over 1 million members and supporters. It is by far the most organized and visible group at all political demonstrations and has majority political representation at the local, state and national level. The MVR makes up about 80% of the pro-revolution alliance at all levels. All the other parties are fairly small in comparison. However, the political basis of the party has been undergoing a dramatic change. It has always been a party that has firmly supported Chavez and the political project that he has outlined, however that has also meant that it has attracted a wide range of political activists - considering that the Chavez project has been somewhat general since his elections in 1998. It has only been in the last 6 months to a year that he has raised the issue of socialism. And so the MVR has had to respond to this political development, and relate to the new direction.

As part of the process, Chavez has called for a consolidation of the pro-Chavez parties. It is a bit unclear what exactly this means. But there is no doubt that Chavez is looking at further consolidating and unifying the revolutionary forces. This might involve a formation under the MVR, or most likely some new formation that brings together all the different forces. Once again a similar process that developed in Cuba between 1959 and 1965 when the Communist Party was established.

But political representation and activity is not solely under the direction of the MVR, the "red party," as it is called. Political organization extends much further and deeper than any political party. The Bolivarian Houses, UBEs, local cultural centers (which tend to take the form of local community organizing centers), the UNT and a large number of other political organizations all play a role in mobilizing the masses in defense of the revolution. Though a large section of the population does belong to, or identifies with, a particular political party, political organization and activity seems to be done much more through their trade unions, student unions, social missions, Bolivarian Houses, UBEs etc. It is for this reason that at May Day 2005, people marched behind their respective work place banner or student union banner or social mission banner etc rather than behind the banner of any particular political party. But this should not confuse people into thinking that there is no political organization or education happening in Venezuela. In fact political organization and discussion happens at a local level in all the organized communities in support of the revolutionary process.

The debate around socialism that was initiated by Chavez has sparked a lot of debate in the national media and amongst all political activists. Within the MVR, it is difficult to tell exactly what factions exist or, if they do, what they stand for. The factions seem to be mainly based upon support of particular Mayors. For example, there has been a lot of confrontation between different sections of the MVR - some public such as a dispute between the mayor of Caracas, Juan Barreto, and Freddy Bernal, the mayor of the municipality of Libertador (central Caracas). In this case there was a protest held in central Caracas by the pro-Barreto forces against Bernal. Rather than taking sides on the issue, Chavez condemned both during his May Day speech and called on them to listen to the people and govern for the people or resign. Since then there have been meetings between Chavez, Barreto, and Bernal which have smoothed things over but large divisions still exist amongst the different supporters of the two mayors.

The discussion around socialism will take a while to sort itself out, but it is developing very quickly. It is clear however that the majority of the MVR membership has firmly supported Chavez's call for a socialism of the 21st century. So far the only ones that have condemned it have been the far right opposition through their media outlets on a daily level. Chavez himself has said that this year is the



year of building revolutionary democracy while next year begins the move towards socialism.

Political consciousness

On the question of political consciousness amongst the masses of Venezuelans, the most striking thing has been how they have taken up the call for socialism. Within the pro-Chavez camp no one has come out against such a call, at least not publicly. There is no doubt that you would have to be very game to come out against Chavez, but it seems to reflect more that people are actually at that level. In all the discussions that I have had with activists on the ground they are very happy to talk about socialism and what it means for the process as well as the close relationship that has been built up with the Cubans.

The political level of the masses that has developed since 1998 is much more advanced than what is generally recognized in the international solidarity movement. This is no social democratic "revolution" or just a fight for national liberation but a conscious battle for socialism. But even more interesting is that they have learnt from the past and the problems that socialism has had and are developing their own formulas to develop it in Venezuela. They are learning very much from the Cubans and the problems that they had during the early years of the revolution. Chavez has increasingly quoted from Che Guevara on how to build a socialist economy. The debate about socialism is centered around the question of how to build a popular economy that can also trade in the international arena.

Local cultural centers that have sprung up around Caracas and the rest of Venezuela function as local political organizing centers where people meet not only to organize the Missions and cultural activities, but also to debate and discuss political issues and organize.

The May Day speech was a significant political turning point for the Bolivarian Revolution. It was along the same lines as the Havana declaration by Fidel Castro in 1961, which outlined the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution. It is significant that Castro and Chavez are meeting almost every month and are in constant phone contact. This not only reflects the numerous agreements that they continue to sign but also the dramatic political similarities that are coming out of Havana and Caracas.

The recent 49 agreements that were signed are a further continuation of the agreements that were signed in December of last year and concretely brings into being the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America (ALBA). Similar agreements have been signed with Brazil and Argentina which brings together the three largest economies in Latin America. Though these are economies that have been exploited by imperialism, their increased unity does mean a significant economic power that puts enormous political and to some extent economic pressure on the US. Though these agreements can not compete with the U.S., they do begin to shut out U.S. imperialist interest in the region. It does this by increasing the pressure on other Latin American countries to join in the ALBA. This process has totally destroyed the U.S. push for a Free trade Agreement with the region.

Industrial workers and the movement for workers control

The question of workers control of industry and what that means is a question that is increasingly being debated in public. At the moment there is a law before the National Assembly that looks at the question of co-management in factories. The law was drafted by the National Union of Workers (UNT), which will most likely be adopted in its entirety in the next few weeks. Though the question is posed as *cogestion*, which translated into English means co-management, it really means workers control of industry. This is the way that people pose it in the factories and I think how we should understand it.

During my visit to CVG Venalum, which is the largest aluminum plant in Venezuela and where the cogestion process has received national attention, it was clear that workers are, first of all, part of management, but also there is no longer so much of a separation between management and the workers. There are regular meetings to discuss what is being produced, how it is being produced and what quantity and quality is being produced. So management is effectively in the hands of the workers. No significant decision is taken without the active participation of the workers. The process is also being opened up to the local community. Increasing discussions are being held between factories and the local community about the role it plays in the local



economy. In the case of CVG in Ciudad Guyana, they discuss what projects the company should be supporting in the local area.

A very similar situation is also taking place in INVEPAL, the other main experiment with *cogestion*. The other significant aspect of this experiment is that this was the first nationalization that has taken place. Up until now the Chavez government has been a bit reluctant to nationalize any property or industry, but at the May 1 demonstration Chavez specifically said that from now on the government would nationalize any factory or land that was not being utilized. The government will also increase pressure on private factories to produce to their full potential. The government would also provide the funding to help make this happen on the condition that workers played a role in the management of the factory. The workers seem very confident that Chavez will back up their demands, but also workers constantly talk of their rights that are enshrined in the constitution. In the face of any attack, they will automatically quote an article from the constitution that defends their rights. Even on a bus out of Merida state, where a state official was charging an exit tourism tax, a man refused to pay based on an article in the Constitution.

Popular Organizations

The UBEs that were initially set up to organize to win the referendum vote in August, and thus called the Electoral Battle Units, have now been transformed into local organizing centers. They are now called the Endogenous Battle Units. Endogenous is a term that is widely used in Venezuela to describe self-organizing and self-sustaining communities. Though they are not armed, they play a role that is in some ways similar to that of the Committees to Defend the Revolution in Cuba. The people are being armed through the reserves, of which the overwhelming majority is also involved in the UBEs.

During *Alo Presidente* in early May, Chavez made a special call for the continued organization of the UBEs. Together with the MVR, the UNT, and the Bolivarian Houses, the UBEs seem to be the backbone of the political organization. Having said that, it is also important to note the role of the government apparatus and the pro-revolution TV stations

VTV and VIVE, as well as revolutionary newspapers such as *Diario Vea*. All these means of communication heavily promote all pro-revolution events with ads, articles, interviews etc. This can not be stressed enough. VTV effectively runs 24-7 with news and information on what the government is doing and what role people can play in all the new initiatives. This also includes a TV soap opera called *Amores de Barrio Adentro* (Lovers of Barrio Adentro) that is sprinkled with drama and suspense about love and relationships but is also a commentary on the revolutionary process.

Another example is in the lead up to May Day, VTV screened ads and discussions about the rally almost continuously for over a week. This reflects that the drive for mass mobilization is not just from below, but being promoted and encouraged from the highest level of government. In all of Chavez's TV appearances, which occurs daily and in many cases for hours, he is always stressing the need for people to actively involve themselves in the revolutionary process and make use of the constitution. During *Alo Presidente*, Chavez stresses the need to get involved in local UBEs, and that mayors need to support them and help them develop into a mass political organization. This is also part of a plan to begin to activate people for the August municipal and local elections and then the National Assembly elections in December and the presidential elections in December of next year.

But one point about the UBEs is that they are not necessarily a homogenous group. They vary quite a bit in their composition and political influence. Together with the Bolivarian Houses, which is what many Bolivarian Circles have become and whose membership overlaps considerably with that of the UBEs, they are central to the political, social, cultural organization of the people. The Bolivarian Circle in the barrio of Guaicaipuro next to where I am staying organizes everything from women's bowls tournament, a soup kitchen, cultural events through to political discussions and organization.

On the other hand massive problems do exist. UBEs and Bolivarian Houses have had problems with local pro-revolution authorities. In some cases, such as in Petare, a Barrio on the outskirts of Caracas, local authorities have blocked some of the activities of the Bolivarian Houses and UBEs because they see them as less democratic and not the real representatives of the people. But those in the UBEs and the Bolivarian Houses see themselves as the true representation of the peoples will. So debates are constantly happening between these political forces. The other issue is that many of the UBEs and Bolivarian Houses are composed of people from all the different pro-revolution forces, so conflict can arise between them and the local MVR authorities. I would also say that in some cases there exists a certain anti-party sentiment within the UBEs and Bolivarian Houses which also creates debates.

There is no doubt there is a lot of frustration amongst the masses, but it does not seem wide-spread or very deep. The interesting thing is that Chavez relates to it very well. In fact, Chavez constantly criticizes local and national authorities for not acting fast enough. Chavez is the first to condemn bureaucratic problems. It seems the major governmental problem is with the middle level apparatus. This is due to a large layer of the public service that is not convinced of change and so plays an active role in slowing down the process.

There is also the issue that amongst some activists within the UBEs and the Bolivarian Houses there is a feeling that if you are not a member of the MVR then you are excluded from a certain level of political access. Though I would say this is the case, it is unclear how widespread this problem is.

The ideological discussions are happening in all different spheres, in the local communities via the Bolivarian Houses, UBEs, within the MVR and in the national TV stations, newspapers and radio stations. The ideological formation centers have been formed, but it is not clear what impact they are having in the broader political discussions. There is no doubt that socialism has become a major point of discussion. What is particularly interesting is that, outside the right-wing, the majority of people have taken it up very positively.

Anyone that has been supportive of the Bolivarian Revolution does not seem to have any problems with the move towards a specifically socialist road. It seems very much that the only people that are anti-Cuba or socialism are the ones that have always been anti-Chavez. It also reflects that some of the key changes under Chavez have involved Cuba, so for many people a move towards socialism seems natural. There is an increasing number of people that have had family members

go to Cuba for operations or to study and more people are coming into contact with Cuban medical personnel and so the barriers have been broken down.

Attitudes and organization of the peasantry

There is definitely frustration within the peasant community. This was seen with the mobilization of peasants of the South West in Merida in early May to demand the land reform laws be implemented and that action be taken to ensure they are defended against landlord-organized repression. Though the peasant organizations are very much in support of Chavez, they do feel that things are progressing too slowly. But once again, Chavez backs up their frustration and calls on them to make their demands and use the constitution to take over land that has not been used productively. In every case where peasants have taken over land, Chavez has supported their actions. During May, a number of peasant activists were killed after a bitter struggle to take over a piece of land near Caracas. This was condemned by Chavez. There is a certain amount of self defense but overwhelmingly the peasants are calling on the national government to take action and use the army and reserves to defend them against repression.

Bureaucracy and corruption.

This is a major problem for the Chavez government. Similar to the first few years of the Cuban Revolution, the Bolivarian Revolution has had to deal with elements of the past. Many in the state apparatus are still within the framework of the Fourth Republic [as the period from the downfall of the dictatorship in 1958 until Chavez's election in 1998 is known] and so either sabotage or at least slow down the process of change. It is for this reason that Chavez has used the army in most of the social missions and is calling on the Bolivarian Houses and UBEs to make sure that things are implemented. A massive campaign has been launched by the government, entitled "The Evolving Democracy". This campaign is directly taking up this question of corruption, bureaucracy and people's participation.

Political parties

The question of how the struggle to create a revolutionary party is going is one that is harder to answer. On the one hand, you have the further consolidation of the MVR as a mass party, but on the other hand it is a hard to define the MVR. Though it is pro-Chavez, exactly what sort of organization it is, is still an open question. But in the recent debate about socialism, it seems that there is more discussion within the MVR about its political line of march. Chavez is calling for the consolidation of the MVR and for it to take up the question of socialism. Though this is a slow process there seems a real possibility that the MVR will take up this call and begin to consolidate itself as a party that is more specifically in favor of socialism.

All the other political parties are really too small to take into consideration. However there are members of the Venezuelan Communist Party that do play an important role in government. And then other groups such as the Revolutionary Marxist Current, identified with the international group identified with Alan Woods, that seems to have some sections of the government that listen to it. Other major parties within the government alliance include *Patria Para Todos* (Homeland for Everyone), of which the current Foreign Minister, Ali Rodriguez, is a member. The Venezuelan government has also used the issues raised by many Latin American intellectuals and activists such as Marta Harnecker, who was one of the main organisers of the Third International Solidarity Conference and appears to have a lot of influence with Chavez, and writers such as Eva Golinger, author of *The Chavez Code*.

Role of the armed forces

The armed forces have been a central pillar of the revolution. They are firmly behind Chavez with all the pro coup generals and officers removed. Many of the heads of the armed forces are on TV regularly supporting the projects and missions. They are very much supported by the people. The armed forces are also the backbone of the missions. The campaign to recruit two million people for the reserves will also help consolidate the Armed Forces as a political force that will defend the revolution. The reserves are part of the move to arm the masses of Venezuelans to defend the revolution against any attacks. This process is also part of the process to democratize the armed forces so that it further integrates itself into society as a whole.

CHINA: FRIEND OF ALL ENEMY OF NONE

INTRODUCTION BY SEAN MACPHERSON

To understand politics, to understand the world in the 21st Century means coming to terms with the People's Republic of China, understanding what China is and what it represents.

The article below, an edited version of a piece first published by Asia Times, introduces the concept of China as the central pillar of a developing counter-pole to US imperialist hegemony. China, the fastest growing economy not only in the world today, but in world history, represents not just a military-economic challenge to the US, as accepted in the article below, but also an ideological challenge. Despite the claims of many, China is not a capitalist or neo-imperialist power. It is a still developing nation, a nation that only liberated itself from colonial occupation 56 years ago and which despite many hurdles, false starts and setbacks, is making great strides along the socialist path. Even western sources admit that China has lifted over 400 million of her people from abject poverty in the past two decades, a historically unprecedented achievement and clearly not something that any capitalist economy has ever been able to match. Only the experience of the USSR in the 30's can bear any comparison and that socialist experiment, carried out under vastly different circumstances and therefore requiring a different set of policies and approaches, was arguably far more brutal and ruthless in its application than Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, to use the Communist Party of China's (CPC) description, has ever needed to be.

Nevertheless, as with any attempt to build a new society from the ruins of the old, there are aspects of Chinese Socialism that sit uneasy on the minds of many, not least it's embrace of market economic measures. However, the proof of the correctness of the path chosen by the CPC since Deng Xiao-ping initiated economic reforms two decades back, has been proved by the rising standards of living that have transformed the lives of hundreds of millions for the better, surely the base-line test for any socialist or progressive?

And it is not only in China that the lives of some of the poorest people on Earth are being improved by the policy of the CPC and the growing wealth of China. An area not mentioned in the article below is China's involvement in aiding and developing the economies of several of the poorest nations of Africa. It is surely no coincidence that just as the G8 imperialist nations suddenly find their consciences, prompted by the frankly bizarre Axis of Mediocrity that is Blair, Brown, Bono and Geldof, and decide that Africa needs to be taken seriously, China is already a well established force for good on that continent, building roads, schools, factories and all the other infrastructural necessities for creating a sound socio-economic base. And they are doing so in co-operation with the governments of Africa and with the heartfelt support of their people, and unlike the G8, without feeling the need to demand "regime change" or forcing local economies to submit to western market demands.

Just as in much of Asia and Latin-America, in Africa China is seen

as the friend of all and the enemy of none. The same clearly cannot be said of the US or the UK, no matter how many faded pop stars they may sign up. From assisting African national-liberation struggles in the 60's and 70's to assisting African economic development today, People's China's record in Africa, whilst not perfect, is still a far cry from the centuries of slavery, exploitation and misery inflicted upon that beleaguered and complex continent by the West.

On a global level the US see's People's China as it's main strategic threat, not because of Chinese belligerence or aggression, but on the contrary because of China's development and popularity. China represents the poor risen. The US represents the wealthy driven insane by greed.

The progressive forces of the world are still far removed from the days of the USSR and the European socialist community when for several decades socialism and liberation was on the advance. But the continuing development and influence of the socialist People's Republic of China and the far-sighted leadership of the Communist Party of China means that in a complex world there is still a progressive pole for those not bought and beaten by untrammled US imperialism or seduced and misled by religious zealots and dreamers.

<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/GF09Ad08.html>

The US and that 'other' axis By Jephraim P Gundzik

Beijing's increasingly close ties with Moscow and Tehran will thwart Washington's foreign policy goal of expanding US security footholds in the Middle East, Central Asia and Asia. However, the primacy of economic stability will most likely prevent a proxy-style military confrontation, in Iran or North Korea, between China and the US.

Threat to 'axis of evil' unwinds in Baghdad

In January 2002 during his State of the Union address to the US congress, President George W Bush outlined his administration's primary foreign policy goal as preventing "regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction". Bush went on to specifically name Iraq, Iran and North Korea as state sponsors of terrorism, infamously dubbing this group the "axis of evil". After failing to gather multilateral support in the United Nation, Bush declared war on Iraq. Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, Beijing has worked feverishly to strengthen its ties with Moscow and Teheran in an apparent effort to prevent US military action against the remaining "axis of evil" members, Iran and North Korea.

In addition to recent massive energy deals with Teheran, which place Iran in China's security web, both Beijing and Moscow have accelerated the transfer of missile technology to Teheran, while selling the Islamic



CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO MEETS CHINESE PRESIDENT HU JINTAO

republic increasingly sophisticated military equipment.

Armed with a vast array of anti-ship and long-range missiles, Iran can target US troop positions throughout the Middle East and strike US Navy ships. Iran can also use its weapons to blockade the Straits of Hormuz through which one-third of the world's traded oil is shipped. With the help of Beijing and Moscow, Teheran is becoming an increasingly unappealing military target for the US. As in the Middle East, the China-Iran-Russia axis is challenging US interests in Central Asia. Washington is working feverishly to gain security footholds in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to complement existing US military bases in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. China and Russia are working equally hard to assert their influence in Central Asia. A good portion of this work is being done under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO.)

Composed of China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the SCO was created in 1996 and reborn in 2001 when it was bolstered to counter the initial eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The SCO is becoming an increasingly powerful regional mutual security organization. Joint military manoeuvres between SCO member states began in 2003. In 2004, the SCO created a rapid reaction anti-terror strike force. According to Igor Rogachev, Russia's ambassador to China, the new force is designed to combat and respond to terrorist attacks in any SCO member nation.

In 2004, Iran made it clear that it was interested in joining the SCO. Iran's mammoth energy deals with China imply that Tehran is now integral to China's national security. A good way to formalize security relations between China and Iran is through the SCO. The autocratic governments of Central Asia have much more in common with China, Iran and Russia than with the US. At the same time, China and Russia can invest exponentially larger sums of money in Central Asian countries than the US. Almost all of China's and Russia's foreign investment is conducted by state-owned enterprises. Investment by these enterprises is primarily driven by geopolitical expediency.

Foreign investment in the US is controlled by profit-driven private enterprises. While the US government can dole out aid to Central Asian countries, the size of this aid pales in comparison to the money that can be lavished on Central Asian countries by China's and Russia's state-owned enterprises. In 2004, commercial and security ties between Kazakhstan and China were strengthened when Beijing signed a deal with Astana to build a pipeline from the Caspian Sea to western China. The pipeline deal with Kazakhstan prompted Beijing to pledge increased military and technical assistance to Kyrgyzstan, through which this pipeline passes. Despite its small size and lack of natural resources, the geostrategic importance of Kyrgyzstan, which hosts military bases for both Russia and the US, is enormous. Recent political instability in Kyrgyzstan especially alarmed Washington.

In early April, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Bishkek to ensure that Kyrgyzstan's new government would continue to host US military forces. In addition, Rumsfeld tried to persuade interim President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to allow the US to station AWACS surveillance planes in Kyrgyzstan. At the beginning of 2005, the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry denied this request by Washington, saying that such equipment was beyond the original humanitarian and peace-keeping mission of US forces in Kyrgyzstan. Bakiyev made it clear that Washington would not be allowed to deploy the AWACS or to establish any more bases or expand existing facilities in Kyrgyzstan. Bakiyev also stressed that US forces would not be in the country permanently. Deepening economic and security ties between Central Asian countries and China and Russia could eventually reduce Washington's influence in the region to Afghanistan. However, in addition to three operational military bases already in Afghanistan, Washington plans on building another six military bases, further amplifying the US military threat to China, Russia and Iran. East Asia is another region where the China-Iran-Russia alliance has common interests diametrically opposed to Washington's. The most obvious country where these interests conflict is North Korea. As with Iran, the Bush administration is determined to force North Korea's government to acquiesce to US security demands. Again, like Iran, North Korea poses a strategic threat to Washington's global hegemony.

aspirations. The mutual antagonism by Iran and North Korea of the US has naturally brought these two countries together. North Korea has been an integral supplier to Iran's ballistic missile program over the past 15 years. The US State Department has sanctioned the Changgwang Sinyong Corporation, North Korea's main missile exporter, four times since 2000 for engaging in proliferation activities with Iran. In 2004, US intelligence reported that North Korea was helping Iran build long-range missiles. While Iran's ties to North Korea are strategic, Russia's and China's ties to the country are security driven. Both Russia and China share common borders with North Korea. The Soviet Union had strong ties with North Korea between 1950 and 1990 punctuated by a mutual security agreement. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia's relations with North Korea weakened sharply. President Boris Yeltsin chose not to renew the mutual security agreement with North Korea in favour of strengthening relations with South Korea. President Vladimir Putin re-established the historically close ties between Russia and North Korea. In 2000, Putin travelled to Pyongyang. North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il, paid return visits to Russia in 2001 and 2002. In addition to official state visits, Moscow and Pyongyang have exchanged several ministry-level visits in the past two years. Pyongyang also enjoys very close relations with Beijing, with which high-level visits have been exchanged regularly in the past several years. More importantly, Pyongyang and Beijing are tied together by a mutual security agreement. North Korea is an important security buffer for both China and Russia against US military projection in Asia. With Beijing and Moscow clearly in accord about countering Washington's global hegemonic aspirations, neither country is likely to sell out their relations with North Korea and this security buffer. More likely, Beijing and Moscow would like to bolster the security buffer in the light of expanding US militarism. It is extremely unlikely that the US will convince North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons and uranium enrichment program because both Beijing and Moscow need North Korea and the security buffer it provides.

**"RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND CUBA ARE A MODEL OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES, WHICH CONTINUE THE IDEALS OF SOCIALISM."
FIDEL CASTRO**

Playing in Washington's backyard

In 2004, Russia and China launched a counter-offensive to the expansion of US militarism in Asia. Beijing and Moscow began to court Latin America's new leftist governments in an unprecedented slap to the US. Both Russia and China have strengthened relations with Washington's arch foe in Latin

America - Venezuela. In November 2004, Moscow agreed to sell Caracas as many as 30 combat helicopters and 100,000 automatic rifles. In addition Venezuela is considering the purchase of up to 50 MiG-29 fighter jets from Russia to replace aging F-16s. The Russia-Venezuela arms deal was widely criticized in Washington. Both Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have voiced strong opposition to the deal. In late 2004, Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez visited Beijing, where he signed several oil sector investment deals with the China National Petroleum Corporation. Chavez has also stated that he would like to give oil export preference to China rather than the US. China also signed significant energy-related investment deals with Brazil, Ecuador and Argentina in 2004. The willingness of Beijing and Moscow to challenge US security so close to home clearly indicates that a geostrategic battle has begun.

Security threat or strategic competitor?

Beijing's expanding foreign relations both within and outside the China-Iran-Russia alliance and China's growing militarism have begun to repaint Washington's perceptions of US-China relations. These perceptions have been echoed by Washington's closest allies in Asia - Taipei and Tokyo. In mid-2004, reports by both the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) and the Pentagon depicted China as a major threat to US national security. The USCC was created by Congress in 2000 "to monitor, investigate and submit to Congress an annual report on the national security implications of the bilateral trade and economic relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China, and to provide recommendations, where appropriate, to Congress for legislative and administrative action". In June 2004, the USCC released its annual report on China. This report noted that China was deliberately using economic warfare against Washington by creating a "competitive advantage over US manufacturers". The report specifically referred to the undervaluation of

the yuan against the dollar and Beijing's (alleged) disregard for World Trade Organization rules as weapons in China's economic war with the US. The report described China's expanding relations with Iran as countering multilateral efforts to stabilize international oil supplies and prices. The USCC report also noted that Russia was supplying increasingly sophisticated weapons to China and that these weapons were part of Beijing's strategy for defeating US forces in the event of war with Taiwan. A congressionally mandated report on China by the Pentagon described China's Russia-assisted military build-up as giving China the ability "to cause significant damage to all of Taiwan's airfields and quickly degrade Taiwan's ground based air-defenses and associated command and control". Most alarming, the Pentagon report warned that Chinese military strategists were considering the use of nuclear weapons against US and Taiwanese forces. The Bush administration's concern over China's growing military power is also depicted in Washington's reaction to the European Union's proposed lifting of its China arms embargo. Washington's greatest concern about renewed arms trade between the EU and China was that this trade would permanently tip the balance of power away from Taiwan and toward China. Even worse, European arms could be used to kill US troops in Asia. Of course, the possibility of Beijing using European weapons to kill US troops presupposes that a war between China and the US will erupt. Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) share Washington's concerns about China's military threat. The Chen government's concern stems from its drive for Taiwan's independence from China and Beijing's forceful reminders that Taiwan is part of China. In the lead up to Taiwan's legislative elections in late 2004, Chen campaigned on a platform of Taiwanese independence. Though Chen's DPP suffered significant losses in these elections, Beijing's response was largely entrained in the form of China's anti-secession law. The law was meant to firmly warn Chen against seeking Taiwan's independence from China in the event that the DPP won a legislative majority. The DPP's losses to the unification-minded opposition takes much of the bite out of the law. In addition, Chen's opposition, the Nationalist Party, has permanently stalled legislation seeking about \$18 billion to bolster Taiwan's missile defense system. The opposition has realized that Taiwan has no hope of defending against a military attack from the mainland, prompting renewed ties between Taiwan's Nationalist Party and Beijing. Along with Washington and Taipei, Tokyo also demonstrated its growing concern over China's increasing military might. In December 2004, the Japanese Defense Agency issued a defense policy guideline that defined China as a potential security threat. The report noted, "China, which has significant influence on the region's security, has been modernizing its

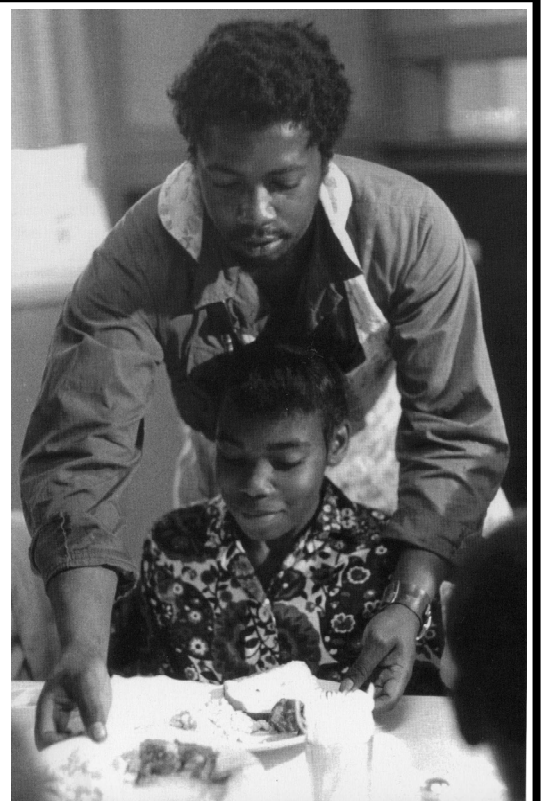
nuclear and missile capabilities as well as naval and air forces, and expanding its area of operation at sea." In a joint US-Japan security statement issued in February, Tokyo went further, agreeing that Japan would "encourage the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue". Both the defense policy guideline and Tokyo's concern over tension between China and Taiwan are a dramatic departure from Japan's post-war foreign policy. The change in foreign policy focus from military pacifism to military assertion is being driven by Washington's own security concerns. These same concerns drove Tokyo to encourage oil exploration in an area of the East China Sea that is claimed by China. Japan's military assertion has accelerated China's defense build-up while contributing to the creation of the China-Iran-Russia alliance. The shift in Tokyo's foreign policy has led to a sharp deterioration in China's relations with Japan. Foreign policies in Beijing, Washington and Tokyo are all characterized by two separate components - geopolitical relations and economic relations.

Cold War redux

Beijing's geopolitical relations with Washington and Tokyo are arguably at their lowest ebb since China established formal relations with the US and Japan in the 1970s. The deterioration in China's relations with the US and Japan and the resultant improvement in relations with Iran and Russia are being driven by Washington's outsized global security concerns. These security concerns are becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy for Washington. In sharp contrast to geopolitical relations, economic relations between Beijing, Washington and Tokyo remain quite strong. The mutual interdependence of these economies argues strongly against the pre-eminence of security issues in overall relations. China is the largest trading partner of Japan and third largest trading partner of the US. In addition to substantial trade links, American and Japanese companies have invested tens of billions of dollars in China over the past 15 years. Nonetheless, Beijing, Washington and Tokyo have all elevated the importance of security to overall economic well-being. While a conflict between the US and China over Iran or North Korea cannot be ruled out, economic interdependence suggests Beijing and Washington have entered a period of geopolitical detente. Beijing's increasingly close relations with Moscow and Tehran will contain Washington's further military projection in the Middle East, Central Asia and Asia and foil the Bush administration's plans for subduing uncooperative governments in Iran and North Korea. Finally, Washington's unilateralist foreign policy will increasingly isolate the US to the benefit of China's foreign economic relations, making Beijing all the stronger. Jephraim P Gundzik is president of Condor Advisers

**"WE THOUGHT IF WE GAVE THE PEOPLE FOOD, THEY MIGHT WANT CLOTHING. IF WE GAVE THEM CLOTHING THEY MIGHT WANT HOUSING. IF WE GAVE THEM HOUSING THEY MIGHT WANT LAND, AND IF THEY HAD LAND, THEY MIGHT WANT SOME ABSTRACT THING CALLED FREEDOM."
ELAINE BROWN, FORMER LEADER OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY**

October 2006 will see the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party. Che-Leila will be holding commemorative events for the founding of the greatest revolutionary movement for freedom in the history of the oppressed people in Amerika.





**OCTOBER 2006 - 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FOUNDING OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY**

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