

COMMENTARY

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Afghanistan war is not the success people might think

Opposition to the planned war on Iraq is mounting around the globe and even in the halls of Congress. Few, however, are willing to criticize the war in Afghanistan, seeing it as the one shining success of the war on terrorism. One year later (the bombing started Oct. 7, 2001), it's a suitable time for a critical look at some of those "successes."

The war increased the threat of terrorism. "Classified investigations of the al-Qaida threat now under way at the FBI and CIA have concluded the war in Afghanistan failed to diminish the threat to the United States," according to the June 16 New York Times. "Instead, the war might have complicated counterterrorism efforts by dispersing potential attackers across a wider geographic area." Middle-level operatives of the al-Qaida network used the opportunity to strengthen contacts with other Islamic groups in the region, increasing the pool from which future terrorists will be drawn. And the war didn't result in the apprehension of Osama bin Laden.

Many innocents were killed. More than 7 million Afghans were directly dependent on aid, which was disrupted for September, October and part of November, first by the threat of bombing and then by the bombing. According to a survey by the London Guardian newspaper focusing on the effects of that disruption, "As many as 20,000 Afghans may have lost their lives as an indirect consequence of the U.S. intervention." Civilian deaths directly from the bombing are variously estimated at an additional 1,000 to 8,000.

The United States installed a puppet regime, throwing democracy out the window. The loya jirga or grand council was peopled with delegates selected by the United States.

According to Omar Zakhilwal and Adeena Niazi, delegates to the loya jirga, "We delegates were denied anything more than a symbolic role in the selection process. A small group of Northern Alliance chieftains decided everything behind closed doors."

Since former monarch Zahir Shah, the most popular candidate for interim president, was unsuitable for U.S. interests, "the entire loya jirga was postponed for almost two days while the former king was strong-armed into renouncing any meaningful role in the government," they said.

At that point, most delegates, aware that the U.S.-backed warlords held the monopoly of military power and fearing for their lives, silently went along with the American hijacking of the process.

The U.S. government has shown little concern for the rights of women in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the expressed commitment to building infrastructure for women's education and health care, both shamefully neglected under the Taliban, the Bush administration has been so niggardly as to block \$134 million in Afghan humanitarian aid, citing domestic economic problems. Of that, \$2.5 million was for the Ministry of Women's Affairs, earmarked to build women's centers across Afghanistan.

The U.S. government has done little to alleviate the extreme humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, let alone rebuild the country. U.S. contributions through UNICEF for Afghanistan have been less than a third as much as Japan's. In fact, today, as winter approaches, 6 million Afghans — a larger number than before Sept. 11, 2001 — are once again on the brink, dependent on humanitarian aid to get through the next months.

The Iraq war is likely to recapitulate all of these results, from an increased risk of terrorism to fake democracy to a humanitarian crisis (relief agencies fear that bombing will disrupt government food distribution in Iraq). We don't need any more "successes" in the war on terrorism.

Rahul Mahajan is the author of "The New Crusade: America's War on Terrorism" (Monthly Review Press, 2002). © 2002, Rahul Mahajan. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.



Steve Baggs Emerald

Letters to the editor

Jokes perpetuate racist stereotypes

As someone of Native American and Celtic descent, I find it very disturbing that there are people in this community who say they are not racist because they have friends with skin colors different than theirs and are from other cultures. Many people with bigoted points of view often use this as a way to excuse racist comments and jokes they make.

"Oh, well it's just a joke. I didn't mean anything by it. See, I have friends of that race/culture that I made the joke about. They don't mind. I've heard them say the same things about themselves."

This is how hate is perpetuated — how it hides in society and becomes slowly acceptable. Racism has more forms than just openly racist views and violent actions.

As a community we need to be aware and not perpetuate stereotypes in any form, or tolerate jokes or comments that mock or poke fun at any race, culture, religion, sexual preference, origin or way of life. When we tolerate these things, we accept them and teach our children to accept them. It is time to break the cycle.

Marie Black
senior
business

New Microsoft policy plays Big Brother

Many PC users may not realize it, but Windows XP and the Windows Media Player are bringing your computer into the Big Brother world of George Orwell's novel, "1984."

When you use the latest versions of these, you give permission to Microsoft to disable any other software they don't like. In particular, these programs may disable programs which convert a CD track to an MP3, even though it's both legal and very convenient to play some music while you work.

To be exact, you agree, "These security related updates may disable your ability to copy and/or play Secure Content and use other software on your computer" (in MS End User License Agreement for XP(SP1) and WMF).

It's like having your own personal policeman sitting in your computer, except the policeman enforces Microsoft's laws, rather than your government's. Microsoft should publicize their new policy: "What will we prevent you from doing today?"

We finally know Big Brother's name. It is Bill Gates.

Tom Trottier
Ottawa, Canada

Drinking milk is irresponsible

Guest commentary

Two years ago, PETA got a rise out of everyone from dairy farmers to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) with its tongue-in-cheek advisory to college kids that, ounce for ounce, beer packs more nutrition than milk.

Now, a new Harvard study has topped off the debate with damning words about dairy products and a raised-glass salute to beer. The debate is about to spill over onto school campuses once again.

When PETA pulled its "Got Beer?" campaign because of public outcry, the uproar from college students was deafening. Most felt that PETA was caving in to members of the older generation who doubted the students' ability to understand the message behind the stunt.

There is much scientific evidence mounting that beer has health benefits previously unrecognized and dairy foods are being implicated in illnesses ranging from diabetes to can-

cer. PETA will revive the campaign with an advertisement in campus papers, as well as with "Got Beer?" bottle openers and beer cozies, which it will distribute through its College Action Campaign.

Unlike beer drinking, dairy consumption also hurts animals. Dairy cows are artificially impregnated — not a comfortable experience — and have their calves torn from them within days of birth, causing acute distress for both mother and calf, so that the milk they need can be sold in the supermarket. Many male calves are crammed into tiny veal crates, a type of confinement so cruel that it has been banned in the United Kingdom.

"Beer in moderation is good for you, while even one glass of milk supports animal abuse and harms your health," PETA vegan outreach director Bruce Friedrich said. "The fact is that you can drink beer responsibly. The same can't be said of milk."

Curtis Taylor is a sophomore attending high school in Eugene.

Where's the dissent for war on Iraq?

SAN ANTONIO (U-WIRE) — It was a well-mannered suburban cocktail party, the kind where people make nice-nice and discussions usually center on the latest "Sopranos" episode or the high price of college tuition these days.

One gentleman, however — a college professor — happened to be wearing a bright yellow sticker on his shirt pocket. It read "No War With Iraq." It wasn't long before another gentleman sidled over to him and commented on the sticker. Not, shall we say, glowingly. Before long, the two were trading back-and-forth opinions about whether the United States should bomb Iraq (one pro, the other decidedly con) and the tension got tight. Faces got a tad red. It was like watching one of those Sunday morning news shows.

I decided to go check out the munchies in the den.

As a latter-end baby boomer, I was born too late for the cultural tumult of the '60s — my generation got disco instead, what a rip-off — but that night I felt something vaguely familiar, even nostalgic: American citizens caring enough to get involved in public debates. Even heated ones. It was, I must admit, a bit thrilling. Could this be the '60s all over again?

As Congress is basically rubber-stamping President Bush's desire to attack Iraq last week, it looks like our country will be whistling bombs-over-Baghdad soon. But a Vietnamesque murkiness surrounds the issue, as reflected in a recent poll that found public support for military action has cooled slightly in the last two weeks.

Sure, Bush still has majority support for going medieval on Saddam — especially in conservative states such as Texas. But even here, not everyone is jumping on the let's-bomb-Iraq bandwagon. And this is surely making for some interesting debates around the water-cooler, the kid's soccer game, the dinner table, the bar.

According to a waitress at Espuma, a trendy coffee shop here, nary a public fight has broken out over the espresso. "But the other day, someone did come in and put peace signs all over our bulletin board." At the Esquire, a downtown destination for stalwart drinkers, a bartender says lively argument has erupted along the famous bar. "Usually it's all the older veterans who say we should go to war," he says. "The younger crowd doesn't really give a crap."

A friend tells me he was at a restaurant recently and one male patron who had overim-bibed started loudly proclaiming his disdain for Bush's war stance. (Perhaps it takes a buzz to get folks to speak out in these parts.) But all politics is local, as they say: Word has it the war/anti-war debate has even seeped into neighborhoods. Ann Ivone, an executive secretary at a local nonprofit group, says she has found herself in verbal skirmishes with a neighbor, an ex-Air Force man.

"This thing with Iraq started and he was all gung-ho about going to war," she says. "And then we started to discuss it, to really take a look at what proof there is (Hussein) has really done anything. And my neighbor said, 'Come to think of it, there is no proof. Nobody has really made a case of why we should attack.' What we're looking at here is a smoke-screen for the economy, some deal with oil. My neighbor has totally turned around."

Ivone says she believes it's her right as an American to voice her dissent. ("We're not part of a totalitarian government — yet.") I wonder how many people feel that way?

Melissa Fletcher Stoeltje writes for Hearst Newspapers. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.