

# NORTH COAST



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*'In a dark time the eye begins to see'*  
~THEODORE ROETHKE

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## BLOOD & OIL

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

A war that could have been prevented and was vigorously opposed by millions of people around the world has been claimed a spectacular victory by the nation that actuated it and rejected any other alternative than preemptive invasion; now the peace is in question.

The rationale for invasion of Iraq, that Saddam Hussein possessed and concealed weapons of mass destruction that were a threat to world peace, has so far not materialized; the second premise that attacking Iraq was the only means to liberate the Iraqi people from a savage despotic regime remains in dispute.

The war in Iraq has been as short as the American attention span. Thousands have surely died in the month-long war, most of them Iraqis, but the counting is slow and reluctant, and ultimately of little concern in the USA because few Americans have been killed.

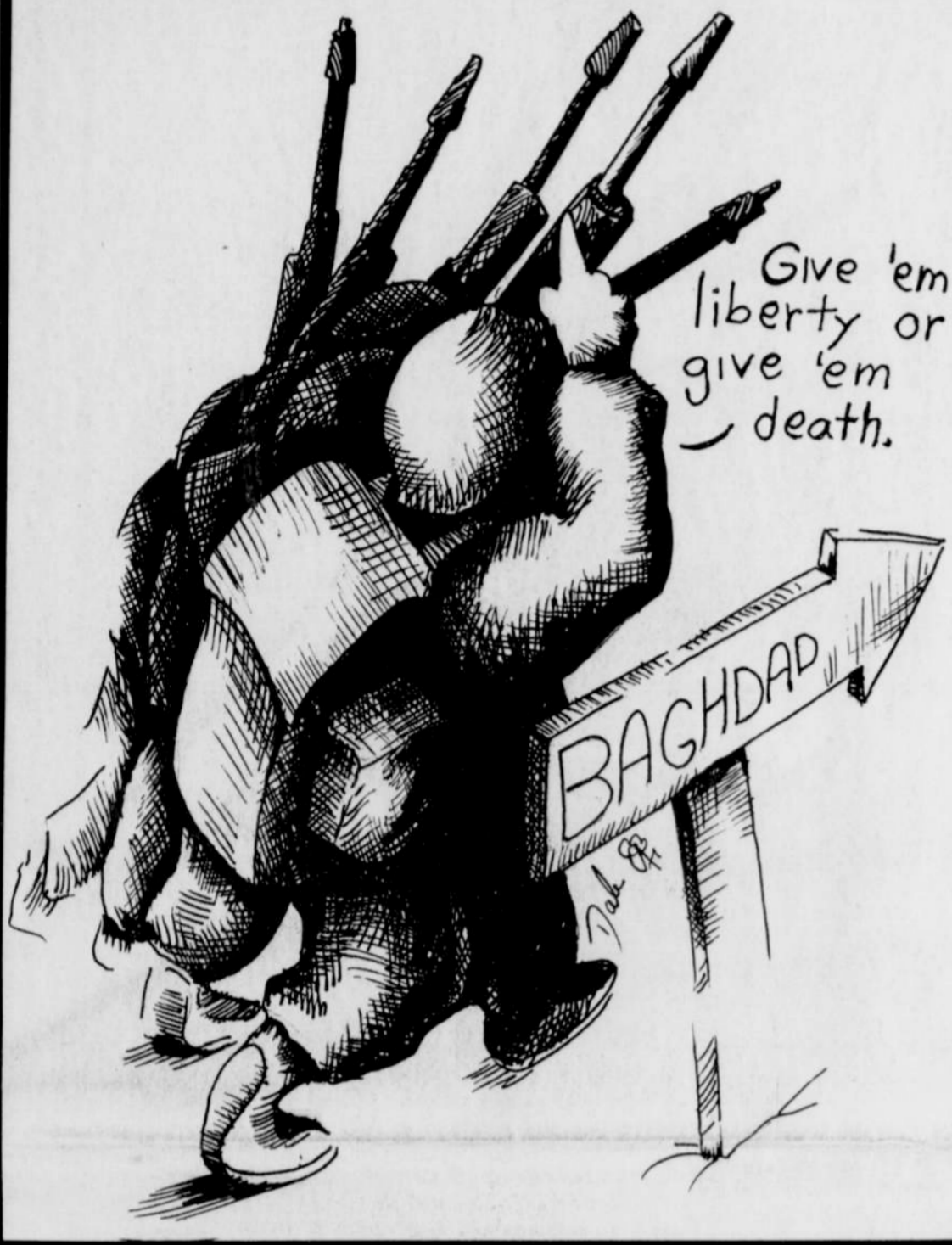
Like the first Persian Gulf War a dozen years ago, the deposal of Saddam Hussein's regime has been a "splendid little war," as Theodore Roosevelt is alleged to have said about the Spanish-American War. That war was America's first war for international empire (following a three century war against Native Americans for 'Manifest Destiny' of the North American continent). Quite like the war with Spain in 1898, the war in Iraq was predicated on the refusal of the American President to consider any other course or alternative to war. President William McKinley rejected increasingly frantic Spanish entreaties to prevent war, ingenuously accusing the Spanish government of bad faith, as did George Bush every Iraqi disclaimer that it possessed the so-called weapons of mass destruction.

The first Gulf War was to protect the world's oil supply, which Saddam Hussein put a chokehold on by invading Kuwait similar to ancient emirates or bandits who occasionally seized portions of the old Silk Road between Rome and China and had to be chased away by armies from one or both. The second Gulf War has been to depose Hussein and take control of Iraq's vast oil reserves, second largest in the world, and to frame U.S. occupation around creating a "democratic state" in the Middle East. America's viceroy to Iraq, a retired Army general rather than a diplomat (but not a corporate mogul either) takes his place in Baghdad as the reigning regent while thousands of American troops continue to pour into the country although the war is essentially over.

The Iraq War was not forced upon the United States by a declared enemy but by its own President and an acquiescent Congress, as well as by ambitious business interests who will reap gazillions of dollars in postwar Iraq, especially in oil and reconstruction contracts. Once championed as "the enemy of our enemy" (Iran), Hussein was demonized as a despoiler of western civilization and a Hitleresque sultan by the very nation that had previously armed him to bolster an iron status quo in the Middle East.

The case made for American empire by its adherents is framed in terms of power; they claim that if the USA does not use its tremendous military superiority much of the world would either dissolve or enflame in chaos. It is their aspiration that the greater manifest destiny of the USA ultimately envelop the planet as its imperial guardian against chaos and disorganization.

This is the New World Order: world military preeminence by the United States — space based weapons, new nukes and combat weapons at least a generation ahead of anyone else in military technology, which we demonstrated in Iraq. The USA is the only reigning superpower after emerging triumphant from a half-century cold war against the Soviet Union, characterized



by bloody inconclusive brushfire wars and a horrendous nuclear arms race that economically and politically broke our competitor but which also critically impaired our own economy and perhaps our collective psyche as well. Not only do we intrude our power of "protection" (a Mafia activity) into critical areas of the world, we engulf their cultures and export our own ideology to supplant them.

But Iraqis, like early 20th century Filipinos, say they can run their own country without American help. The Filipinos had mistakenly hoped their liberation from Spain would result in independence and resisted their new American masters with a bitter insurgency that in length and the furious response of attrition against them was a precursor to the Vietnam War sixty years later. In the 1920s similar tactics were used in a series of "Banana Wars" in Latin America and the Caribbean in which the U.S. set up puppet regimes that managed U.S. interests with death squads and iron political control.

Bush asserts America's cause as moral and just. But there really is no such thing as a just war, only defense or revenge against unjust acts of violence or aggression. Perhaps a certain cause might be considered just, but no such claim can be made for the carnage that results.

Bush and Saddam Hussein have demonstrated their desire to impose political power over a vital part of world commerce, each capable of expending masses of human lives to obtain his goal. Bush claims to talk with God and insists he has a divine mandate to rid the world of tyranny and terrorism. His ecclesiastic justifications for the exchange of blood for geopolitical supremacy, his concept of a New World Order (fashioned whole cloth from his father's own vision-thing) of global manifest destiny which he also proclaims as "the Next American Century" is distinctly Orwellian: "War is peace," he says.

Dissent against the war in Iraq has been craftily undermined with the virtual decree that everyone support American troops in Iraq whether or not they support the war. That is rather like saying one can deplore the deed but praise the doer; in this case, taking offense against the killing should not interfere with cheering on the killers. War protesters are equated with terrorists and implied to be traitors.

The real shock and awe of the Iraq War has been the incessant assault on American civil liberties by the Bush administration which is turning the U.S. into a homeland security state that relies on martial law rather than democracy. The national dialogue is being reduced to pious simplicities in which "patriotic" Americans can do no wrong and the rest of the world is either with us or against us, which includes "unpatriotic" Americans who disagree.

Bush might have wished for Saddam Hussein to unleash weapons of mass destruction (nuclear or biocide) in a dying act of defiance at the toppling of his regime, which could have provided an excuse to retaliate with so-called tactical nuclear weapons not only for revenge — presupposing Bush put American troops into harm's way for just such a possibility — but also to intimidate the world's governments with the capacity of American military power and its new role as leader of the NWO.

The Bush administration is taking a major risk threatening the possibility of continuing (and certainly escalating) war in the Middle East, not only among Arab nations but here in the homeland. A much greater schism than already exists in the U.S. might result as large numbers of Americans feel betrayed and the craftily engineered propaganda (call it public relations) campaign against dissent and dissenters backlashes despite increasingly draconian laws legislated to squelch opposition.

The Bush administration is shaping up as the most culturally and politically repressive in the short history of the American republic. The President, who seems to brashly disregard any "evil" in his own empire or among his avaricious friends and patrons, sermonizes about freedom and human rights while these same cohorts make an intolerable grab for power in the form of corporate plutocracy that is severely eroding much of the basic fiber of democracy.

Every community in the USA is divided over the Iraq War and despotic policies of the Bush administration. Portraying opponents of the war (or the Bush Presidency) as heretics and apostates and threatening to constrain them with repressive laws is not quite the liberty and freedom the war was claimed to have been fought to preserve. A growing number of Americans recognize the seeds of Saddam Hussein inherent in Bush & Company.



DRAWINGS BY ASTORIA ARTIST DALE FLOWERS