

## I Almost Forgot

Here we are seven years after the start of our war in Iraq and I almost forgot to mark the anniversary. With so many thousands dead and so many millions displaced, without a lot to show for it, I guess there would be a tendency to forget. Political infighting and factional violence are what currently rules in Baghdad. There is corruption and larceny on the same scale that existed before we invaded. A dictator is dead, so are some of his henchmen. We have long since passed the trillion dollar mark in expenditures while we argue over health care at home. Lockheed, Raytheon and Halliburton have done very well and the rest of the arms profiteers are looking forward to our next adventure, wherever it may be. Meanwhile neighboring Iran has filled the power void in the region left by our destruction of Iraq. That makes Iran the current "challenge" in our quest to westernize the east.

The smartest thing that the war machine ever did was to institute an all volunteer military. We now have wars that no one cares about except for the families of those soldiers deployed to the conflict. If your children die or are maimed in those battles it's their own fault. They knew what they were signing up for, they volunteered. Dick Cheney actually said as much and from a certain twisted, amoral point of view he was right. The reason that the Viet Nam War was so unpopular was that so many of its soldiers were drafted. These were people who didn't sign up but rather they were dragged over there to die and their friends and families and millions of others took to the streets in protest.

Viet Nam was about the bogus threat of international communism and Iraq was about the bogus threat of weapons of mass destruction. We bought them both for a while and apparently we'll buy the next one. That's who we are. We need bad guys and the war profiteers are given the contracts to defeat the bad guys, wherever we can find them. It's a nice little circle. One enables the other. Let me repeat that. Our culture needs bad guys to fight against and our defense contractors need to make the stuff that kills the bad guys. As a culture we need to win something, anything will do (see Grenada) and as an economy we need to keep making land mines and cluster bombs and drones. Heaven forbid we should turn our factories over to solar panels and hydrogen batteries and mass transit. Death makes more money and that's what matters. If it makes money it's OK. If it makes a lot of money, it trumps anything else.

Modern warfare is not about ideals folks, it's about money. It is not Democracy, it's profits. Peruse the annual report of any of the world's leading manufacturers and you will see that it makes no difference to them whether they make granola or grenades. If the product makes money then the product is worth making. After all, businesses owe their shareholders (some of whom are you and me) the largest possible return on dollars invested. That's a great definition of business ethics isn't it? What you make and who it kills is secondary to the money it generates. If a portion of our retirement portfolios happens to be earning money, even at the cost of a child in Bosnia, that's just the cost of doing business isn't it? We didn't tell her to walk through that abandoned mine field; all we did was pay for the landmine that killed her.

No wonder Jefferson was wary of an investors' (speculators') nation. No wonder Eisenhower warned us about the military-industrial complex. Those two men weren't exactly raving alarmists but they did know danger when they saw it. They were very different from each other but came to the same conclusion about the power of the war business. Jefferson hated the thought of a standing army. Eisenhower's life was the standing army. Jefferson was an idealist in the extreme, his head often in the clouds, while Ike was the picture of pragmatism. And yet both men warned us against the dangerous combination of war and those who would profit from war. It is a simple fact of life that there are many powerful business interests which want very much for our country to be at war, somewhere on the planet, almost constantly. That's how they make money. They wouldn't care if the conflict was about freedom or frijoles, democracy or denim. Whether sublime or ridiculous, it all pays the same.

So here we are seven years into our business venture in Iraq and the anniversary passes quietly. Not so quietly for the families of the dead, I'm sure. Not so quietly for the volunteer soldiers who face their next deployment to Baghdad. Not so quietly for all the citizens of Iraq who have bled and bled again for our 'investment' but quietly enough that we, the citizens of the United States who fund it all, almost forgot.