

Interview Roy

## 'The War That Never Ends'

By Arundhati Roy And Anthony Arnove

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Q. THE WAR ON IRAQ HAS BECOME AN OCCUPATION. IS IRAQ A NEW COLONY?

Yes, but it's proving to be a pretty recalcitrant one. Maybe we should rethink the notion that Iraq has been "conquered." American soldiers are dying every day, more now than during the war.

Q. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN THREATENING IRAN, SYRIA AND NORTH KOREA. DO YOU THINK IRAQ WAS JUST A PRELUDE?

In this particular chapter of War and Empire, the war on Afghanistan was the real prelude. Basically "The War on Terror" is Bush's perfect war, the war that never ends. The weapons deals that never stop. The oil fields that never dry up.

But maybe those who supported the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were too quick to declare victory. In both countries now, U.S. troops are bogged down in a kind of quick sand. That's why the U.S. government is trying to coerce other countries like India and Pakistan to clean up the mess it has left behind.

If the United States now attacks Iran, Syria, or North Korea, its troops will be further strung out across the globe. But then the physics of Empire seems to be encrypted in some way--overreach and implode. Maybe that's what will happen. But the downside is that the U.S. arsenal of nuclear weapons might ensure that the American Empire is the last empire the human race will ever know.

Q. HALLIBURTON JUST ANNOUNCED INCREASED PROFITS LARGELY BECAUSE OF ITS IRAQ OPERATIONS. WHO'S PROFITING FROM THIS WAR AND WHO ISN'T?

Halliburton is an old player in Iraq. It's not every corporation that can boast of having the army and the entire military might of the most powerful country on earth at its disposal, risking life and limb in order to increase its margins of profit.

If I were a U.S. soldier, risking my life and sanity in the 100-plus-degree deserts of Iraq, I'd be asking some pretty serious questions of the CEOs of companies like Halliburton. How much do you earn? How much do I earn? What do you risk? What do I risk?

Equally, if I were a student, or a school teacher, or a health worker or a single mother in the United States, reading about the huge cuts in public spending, I'd be asking a very simple question about this war: Who pays, who profits?

I think what I find most insulting of all is the complete confidence with which George Bush the Lesser and his henchmen do what they do, assuming that American people are just plain stupid, and that public memory is fickle.

America's poor are being exploited and put on the frontlines to ensure further profits for America's rich. It's for this reason that it's ridiculous and self-defeating to be "anti-American." America is not one homogenous mass of brutality.

One-fifth of the armed forces are African American. I don't imagine anywhere close to one fifth of the profits of this war go to African American people. Asians and Latinos are in the army, hoping to get citizenship. What a great system. Get the Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and poor whites to fight your boardroom battles for you...

Q. IRAQ IS BEING OPENED UP FOR PRIVATIZATION IN THE NAME OF DEMOCRACY. WHAT IS PRIVATIZATION ABOUT?

It's quite unbelievable. The kinds of things that are being done these days in the name of "democracy" would be laughable if it weren't so savage. Privatization is the anti-thesis of democracy. It is the process of transferring public assets, held in trust for the public good, to private companies to amass private profit. It is simply unacceptable.

Q. SOLDIERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE SPEAKING OUT AGAINST THE OCCUPATION. WILL THIS HELP RALLY INTERNATIONAL OPPOSITION?

I think speaking out against the occupation is the bravest thing that a soldier can do. I have always admired the U.S. soldiers who spoke out against the Vietnam War. In fact, in places like India, when people get randomly racist and anti-American, I always ask them: When do you last remember Indian soldiers speaking out against a war, any war, in India?

When soldiers speak out, people really sit up and listen. I cannot think of a better way of rallying international opposition to the occupation. To those American soldiers who have had the courage to speak out, I send my heartfelt salaams.

Q. PRESIDENT BUSH HAS ASKED INDIA TO SEND TROOPS TO HELP "CONTROL" IRAQ. WHAT IS YOUR REACTION?

Bush probably knows that rightwing religious fundamentalists, regardless of what religion they subscribe to, are brothers in arms. George Bush, Osama bin Laden, Ariel Sharon, the mullahs of Pakistan and the L.K. Advani's and Narendra Modi's of India have no trouble understanding each other.

In India, the present government is not just right wing, it is skating very close to fascism. For the first time in the history of independent India, the Indian government (the coalition led by the Bharatya Janata Party) is trying hard to align itself with the U.S.-Israel axis. It is not a coincidence that the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, conducted with the brazen collusion of the government and the police, took place so soon after Sept. 11. Neither is it a coincidence that the case is closed internationally, because killing Muslims now, after Sept. 11 is somehow seen as acceptable.

If Indian troops aren't sent to Iraq, the reason won't be a lack of will on the part of the Indian government. It will be because the proposal has caused serious outrage among Indian people, a majority of whom were also incensed by the war in Iraq.

**Anthony Arnove** is the editor of *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War and Terrorism and War* (interviews with Howard Zinn). He is an editor at *International Socialist Review*.

