

The New American Century

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In January 2003 thousands of us from across the world gathered in Porto Alegre in Brazil and declared--reiterated--that "Another World Is Possible." A few thousand miles north, in Washington, George W. Bush and his aides were thinking the same thing.

This article was adapted from Arundhati Roy's January 16 speech to the opening plenary of the World Social Forum in Mumbai.

Our project was the World Social Forum. Theirs--to further what many call the Project for the New American Century.

In the great cities of Europe and America, where a few years ago these things would only have been whispered, now people are openly talking about the good side of imperialism and the need for a strong empire to police an unruly world. The new missionaries want order at the cost of justice. Discipline at the cost of dignity. And ascendancy at any price. Occasionally some of us are invited to "debate" the issue on "neutral" platforms provided by the corporate media. Debating imperialism is a bit like debating the pros and cons of rape. What can we say? That we really miss it?

In any case, New Imperialism is already upon us. It's a remodeled, streamlined version of what we once knew. For the first time in history, a single empire with an arsenal of weapons that could obliterate the world in an afternoon has complete, unipolar, economic and military hegemony. It uses different weapons to break open different markets. There isn't a country on God's earth that is not caught in the cross-hairs of the American cruise missile and the IMF checkbook. Argentina's the model if you want to be the poster boy of neoliberal capitalism, Iraq if you're the black sheep. Poor countries that are geopolitically of strategic value to Empire, or have a "market" of any size, or infrastructure that can be privatized, or, God forbid, natural resources of value--oil, gold, diamonds, cobalt, coal--must do as they're told or become military targets. Those with the greatest reserves of natural wealth are most at risk. Unless they surrender their resources willingly to the corporate machine, civil unrest will be fomented or war will be waged.

In this new age of empire, when nothing is as it appears to be, executives of concerned companies are allowed to influence foreign policy decisions. The Center for Public Integrity in Washington found that at least nine out of the thirty members of the Bush Administration's Defense Policy Board were connected to companies that were awarded military contracts for \$76 billion between 2001 and 2002. George Shultz, former Secretary of State, was chairman of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. He is also

on the board of directors of the Bechtel Group. When asked about a conflict of interest in the case of war in Iraq he said, "I don't know that Bechtel would particularly benefit from it. But if there's work to be done, Bechtel is the type of company that could do it. But nobody looks at it as something you benefit from." In April 2003, Bechtel signed a \$680 million contract for reconstruction.

This brutal blueprint has been used over and over again across Latin America, in Africa and in Central and Southeast Asia. It has cost millions of lives. It goes without saying that every war Empire wages becomes a Just War. This, in large part, is due to the role of the corporate media. It's important to understand that the corporate media don't just support the neoliberal project. They *are* the neoliberal project. This is not a moral position they have chosen to take; it's structural. It's intrinsic to the economics of how the mass media work.

Most nations have adequately hideous family secrets. So it isn't often necessary for the media to lie. It's all in the editing--what's emphasized and what's ignored. Say, for example, India was chosen as the target for a righteous war. The fact that about 80,000 people have been killed in Kashmir since 1989, most of them Muslim, most of them by Indian security forces (making the average death toll about 6,000 a year); the fact that in February and March of 2002 more than 2,000 Muslims were murdered on the streets of Gujarat, that women were gang-raped and children were burned alive and 150,000 driven from their homes while the police and administration watched and sometimes actively participated; the fact that no one has been punished for these crimes and the government that oversaw them was re-elected...all of this would make perfect headlines in international newspapers in the run-up to war.

Next thing we know, our cities will be leveled by cruise missiles, our villages fenced in with razor wire, US soldiers will patrol our streets, and Narendra Modi, Pravin Togadia or any of our popular bigots will, like Saddam Hussein, be in US custody having their hair checked for lice and the fillings in their teeth examined on prime-time TV.