

# Editorial

## Speak Truth to Power

At the end of June 2003, the European Network for Peace and Human Rights held its conference in the European Parliament. The horrors of the war on Iraq were by no means finished, but already there was deep disquiet about the possibility of continuing hostilities, and extending them to Iran, not to say Korea and other places far away from the Iraqi border.

Continued war, and continuing threats of war, persuaded the peace movements and their associates in the movement for human rights that they should make strenuous efforts to join their forces, bringing together not only movements in Europe and now, since the Cordoba conference, in the Middle East, but also seeking the opinions of American co-thinkers. So it was agreed to try to organise a meeting of the Network in the United States, possibly in Washington, under the heading 'Speak Truth to Power'. Peace people in the United States have been trying to do this for long enough: but it is arguable that Europeans can no longer achieve this objective within the continent of Europe alone, because the power that used to inhere in their own institutions has been to some degree displaced.

Concern about American military doctrines, notably that of Full Spectrum Dominance, reinforce the view that power has migrated across the Atlantic. As Gabriel Kolko argues below, this is an exaggeration, even if it is an understandable one. But nonetheless, the recovery of democracy, in Europe as in the United States, is a labour necessarily undertaken co-operatively.

During the British Foreign Secretary's visits to Baghdad, in a timorous hit and run mission, (in which, far from ceremonial parades and guards of honour, he was smuggled aboard a helicopter and hidden from view) it has been announced that the occupation of Iraq will take a very long time. Around the world, clients are drilled to provide levies of troops. There is public speculation about whether the occupation will continue for seven years or for ten. Sanitized, the public story is given out that it will last for two.

All of us can see how much worse this situation will become when the failure to create democratic institutions in Iraq becomes an object of anger among the people. Is it at that point that the crisis will be compounded by the invasion of Iran? And how will George Bush and Tony Blair administer the resultant convulsive mess? It might be possible to kill a large number of Iranians, and to augment the numbers of dead Iraqis. There can be a pogrom of the Ayatollahs. But peace? Nothing is less likely.

By far the best solution for this wholly unnecessary conflict, before it becomes a conflagration, is the withdrawal of the allied occupation. All of the international institutions which might have been helpful in securing this have incurred serious disabilities in the run up to the invasion: certainly the new American alliance, the stunningly mistitled 'Global Peacekeeping Force', is highly unlikely to substitute for either the UN, or even Nato.

The UN Security Council was sabotaged by the United States, because it could not be induced to vote support for the American invasion of Iraq. The UN has been far from a free-standing agency for the upholding of justice: subject as it has been to great power manipulations of various kinds, not excluding outright bribery. But neither the wiles nor the chequebooks of American power could legitimate the proposed invasion.

Nato by contrast could not be relied upon for the invasion, because it is formally speaking an alliance, and its Council not only might disagree, but does disagree with the senior partner. American generals apparently decided as long ago as the Kosovo war that such an alliance was dysfunctional for actual fighting, since the subaltern members had a regrettable tendency to answer back, and to threaten disobedience.

The new proposal, reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, is to arrange for a standing international peacekeeping force which can be sent anywhere, without involving untoward arguments with American power. Such a force will indeed be necessary for a decade long occupation of Iraq, even if this does not turn into a simultaneous occupation of Iran. But where is it to be recruited? There are numerous client states, in various stages of dependency, and some have already been approached for a short-term occupation of Iraq by the British accomplice. But who will volunteer for the longer task, which will include the permanent occupation of all those other lawless territories, across Central Asia, and out to the Korean periphery? Perhaps the various missions to Mars will generate little green soldiers who like taking orders and being shot at, and ask for neither recompense nor recognition?

Speaking truth to power seems, when one looks at the juggernaut towering over us, to require some courage. But when one looks at the impossible tasks which the juggernaut is creating for itself, speaking truth offers the only conceivable prospect for a humane outcome to a monstrous gathering crisis.

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