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Shock And Yawn

Plan could kill millions in 48 hours. Why don't Americans Care?

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Exactly a month ago Pentagon planner Harlan Ullman, in a *CBS-TV* interview, publicly revealed for the first time the Pentagon's "Shock and Awe" plan for its assault upon Iraq, should (or when) George W. Bush orders it.

Ullman's information was subsequently confirmed by a number of sources; it's for real. Here is what I wrote about it in my column of January 30:

"The plan includes simultaneous ground invasions from north and south . . . It also includes a sudden decimation of Baghdad by raining down on its people, in two days, over 800 cruise missiles -- more than were used in the entire Gulf War. Ullman . . . characterized the Baghdad assault thusly: 'You have this simultaneous effect, rather like the nuclear weapons of Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks but minutes.' It would be a firestorm, a Dresden or Tokyo with 60 years of new technology. It would be a war crime of quick and staggering proportions.

"Such a plan, of course, makes a mockery of Donald Rumsfeld's ritual insistence that the Pentagon takes enormous care to avoid civilian casualties; the plan apparently is to kill a staggering percentage of Baghdad's civilian population in the first day alone. . . . The name refers to the demoralizing effect such an attack would have on Iraqis, an effect, presumably, similar to the instant (although already planned) surrender of Japan after the gratuitous bombing of Hiroshima (and even more gratuitous bombing of Nagasaki. But those were, both military and diplomatically, demonstration attacks -- suggesting what could be done to the imperial rulers themselves and to Tokyo, a city far more valuable and populous than Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.

"In Iraq, Baghdad *is* the capitol."

Now, those plans, and sentiments of horror similar to mine, have been echoing around the Internet for a month; they've been featured extensively in alternative publications that have come out during that time. Which is precisely the problem.

The United States is planning to suck all the oxygen out of the air with a fireball over the heads of the five million residents of Baghdad -- so that, as another Pentagon interviewee said, "nobody in Baghdad will be safe," whether above ground or below. This has been well-documented public knowledge for a month, widely reported in the rest of the world. But in America it has been roundly ignored, confined to the fringes of the media landscape and probably, by many Americans, dismissed as a result as conspiracist nonsense.

This raises two questions:

1. Are Americans -- politicians, media executives, and ordinary citizens -- so numb, or oblivious, or callous to the horrors of war that we cannot raise ourselves to be bothered by what would be, *if it works as planned*, one of the greatest massacres, one of the greatest war crimes, in the history of the world, committed in our name and with our money?
2. Forgetting for a moment those apparently irrelevant concerns about millions of innocent lives, war crime tribunals, and the like, do America's war planners seriously think such an action would *decrease* the motivation or effectiveness of terrorists, who are presumably the target of the "War on Terror" and who will most certainly not be in Baghdad? (More, in fact, are likely to be huddled in any major American city. Perhaps we should preemptively bomb Philadelphia or Houston.)

To take the last question first, whether it is ever implemented or not, even the publicizing of this plan does incalculable damage to the already-abysmal reputation of the United States in the Islamic world and beyond. Any country that would even seriously consider such a monstrous act certainly isn't going to be shown mercy when war is brought to *its* civilian population. That's you and me.

According to captured Al-Qaeda documents, planners of the 9/11 massacre had originally considered flying jets into American nuclear facilities, but decided not to do so on "humanitarian" grounds. Does anyone think that, after our amphetamine-soaked pilots casually incinerate a major world city and its inhabitants, that they'll show such restraint next time? You know the answer.

Muslims, who, like the rest of the world, seem to have a longer memory than we do, will also recall that a massive famine, killing up to six or seven million Afghans, was only narrowly averted in fall 2001, even though the U.S. bombing campaign cut off badly needed supplies almost until it was too late -- and would have continued to do so had the Taliban not retreated. Shock and Awe, then, is the second serious brush with genocidal civilian death from the Bush crew in only 15 months. And we genuinely wonder why anyone hates us? Who wouldn't?

It is as if Bush and his sociopathic advisors *want* stronger terrorist groups -- *want* further attacks on Americans -- so as to justify their lust for global military dominance. Regardless, they're certainly doing their best to provoke it.

And this brings us to the initial question: why don't Americans seem to care? Again, setting aside niggling questions of morality, plans like this, whether executed -- er, carried out -- or not, put every single person living in this country in far greater danger. Forget duct tape; we need protecting from the Bush White House, and from the record levels of new and deepening anti-American sentiment it is generating daily.

Some would point to corporate control of media as the culprit in the lack of publicity given to Shock and Awe, but I suspect the more significant factor is more banal. Such images of mass suffering are so overwhelming in their scope that they mean nothing to most of us. If 9/11 seemed like a movie -- as many Americans said at the time -- Shock and Awe represents a horror so sweeping it has only rarely been depicted on film, and never by Hollywood. You simply can't have an action hero take on a nuclear bomb in mid-detonation, or a barrage of cruise missiles (and munitions using *un*-depleted uranium) that have a similar, instantly

lethal effect. What you would have is an action hero called The Shadow, because that's what would be left of him, burned into the sidewalk along with a few million husbands, wives, moms, dads, and children.

Politically, this country's leaders could not even conceivably propose turning America into a nation permanently at war, let alone one capable of such monstrosity. Unless, under the leadership of both major parties, we had not spent decades being inured to American militarism, and, in the last few years, to bombings, invasions, and civilian deaths in faraway lands. Granted, most of the least desirable aspects of American militarism have been carefully excised from U.S. media, but even so, what we *do* get to see and hear should horrify anybody. It doesn't, and so, an apocalyptic vision like Shock and Awe becomes just another abstract headline, part of the arcana of military planning, completely divorced from the daily reality of our extremely comfortable lives. No wonder news editors don't think we'd care.

But, of course, as February 15 literally demonstrated, many of us do care. And hopefully, many of us will keep caring long after Bush either backs down or incinerates the cradle of civilization. (Ashes to ashes, indeed . . .) The problem, ultimately, isn't Saddam Hussein, or Iraq, or even George Bush. The problem is militarism, and a purported democracy in which its leaders think themselves above accountability for their actions. Or crimes.

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