

The War on Terror and Democracy

An Arab American Perspective

Neal AbuNab

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Foreword

This book is a collection of essays and articles published primarily in the Arab American News in 2005-2006, in the metro Detroit area where the largest concentration of Arabs outside the Middle East lives. I am grateful to the publisher of the Arab American News and its editorial staff for their devotion to bringing to the American people an alternative point of view. A perspective that Americans rarely hear in the mainstream media.

It's been almost five years since the tragic attacks of 9/11 which triggered the war on terror and initiated a policy of spreading democracy in the Arab and Muslim world. The name of this book comes from this critical subject that had a profound effect on people's lives here and abroad. It has affected every one from the way we look at flying to new attitudes towards religion to the way we approach social justice.

What has this war achieved so far? How long do we expect it to continue? Will there be an end to this war? What does victory look like? All these are questions that I attempt to answer in my weekly columns and frequent commentary. The Arab American perspective is unique because it appreciates the two sides of this story and it offers an insight that is missing in the US corporate media.

Most of the talking heads that dominate this debate are either extreme right-wingers or extreme left-wingers and cool heads rarely prevail. This conflict will require the United States to change its attitude and behavior towards Arab and Muslim nations. Anyone who claims that change has to come from the other side alone is in denial. By the act of war in Afghanistan and Iraq America had already changed. But many years of strife and hundreds of thousands of lives can be spared if America adopts a consistent foreign policy that respects the aspirations of Muslim nations.

What do Muslims want? What do Americans want? What does every human being want? Freedom, respect, security and an opportunity to earn a dignified livelihood. It is no mystery that America can end this war in 100 days. It can resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and enforce a universal code of human rights on itself and on every state on earth. But America's heart is divided and it won't apply such a code upon itself. Its internal squabbles are materializing on the world stage and foreign policy is at best inconsistent.

The War on Terror has challenged the tenets of western democracy. Democracy is a movement that reflects the deep faith, culture and heritage of a nation. Post 9/11 America was transformed into a Christian democracy with a Jewish heart. The Middle East can not have a Christian democracy because its heart will always be Muslim.

Democracy in the Arab world will produce non-secular governments such as Hamas in occupied Palestine. This was no secret prior to 9/11 as the experience was tried in the Algerian elections in 1991 and the government nullified the results which led to widespread violence for many years. All over the Arab world, if so called free and democratic elections were held today, they will yield Islamist governments allied with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq will yield in the end the exact opposite result that America hoped for. President George Bush exhausted the now-defunct argument of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD's), and then began peddling the idea of a democratic haven in the midst of all these dictatorships. But the democracy in Iraq will eventually produce a regime that looks more like Iran's than America's. Iraq will become a natural ally of Iran in a conflict with America.

In the past one hundred years, the Arab world has tried every type of government. They imported the secular ideas of communism and capitalism but they were applied in extreme measures always resulting in dictatorships. Monarchies are still around and they continue to thrive as they dig their heels deeper installing feudal lords and tribal chiefs with absolute loyalty to the Monarch.

The people of the Arab and Muslim world are angry and hungry. It is a volatile combination that will keep exploding until real democracy evolves from the street level. The United States will finally realize that such Islamist movements of freedom are totally consistent with its founding principles. Till then, we are in for a long and bumpy ride.

Neal AbuNab
April 2006

January 15, 2005

A Palestinian who wants to Vote

I call Ramallah every so often to check up on the family home. After the passing of my father I inherited a thankless job. I asked my trusted friend, on this occasion, if our Home voted in Sunday's Elections. Since its owners don't have the right to vote.

My friend always gave me the real pulse of the Palestinian Heart. He said that business is the fiber of existence. Insecurity has scared money away. There are no jobs any where, except in Ramallah. People flock there like they're coming to America.

They voted for Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) because he's friends with George W. Bush. They will grab at any straws of hope and optimism. Though, they know Sharon all too well. They know everything rests in his tight fist.

Abdul-Jawad Saleh was the Mayor of neighboring Al-Bireh in 1964. He built our Home. The stone masons hand-crafted every stone. For years, the front yard was a make-shift quarry like a scene from the Flintstones.

But the house was finally built. We were supposed to move in on June 5th, 1967. But instead Israeli tanks rolled in. We became homeless overnight.

The house was guarded by "Abeed" (Black Palestinians from Jericho). We paid them to live in it. They had a family of eight children and the old man died. Then, my father died. His half brothers coveted the house and hovered over it like vultures.

They kicked the "Abeed" out. They let squatters move in. The squatters said they were Fatah. In 1994, I went back to reclaim it from Fatah, the squatters, and the half-uncles.

I gained the trust of the half-uncles by marrying into them. I paid the squatters \$10,000 and reclaimed the sad house. It looked like a junkyard in a Farmington Hills subdivision.

The house told me stories of the Intifadha. People were jailed in its basement, interrogated, and some lost their souls. The bullet holes in

the walls whispered tales of steel-tipped heavy Israeli boots. The bomb blasts on the outer facade spoke of resilient resistance. Mortar shells only left black rings of smoke on the invincible Palestinian stone.

I bonded with the House and the land it sat on. I renovated it. I employed needy refugees from close by Al-Amaari camp, who claimed to be Fatah leaders. I gave it all I got. But the land of Milk and Honey had sucked me dry. It turned out to be barren like a wrinkled old prune. It'd become the land of perpetual misery. A land full of stones and thorns. It just produced tears in the end regardless of the noble intentions or the effort.

Abdul-Jawad Saleh was allowed to return. He is a member of the Palestinian Parliament now. He screams and shouts about government reforms and most of his words fall on deaf ears.

Palestinians are worn out by tyranny and violence, from within and from without.

I envy the Iraqis of Dearborn. America begs them to vote. I still whisper to people I am a Palestinian. But in the eyes of the most powerful nations on this earth, I don't exist.

My father and mother were born and raised in the old city of Jerusalem. My father lost a hundred of his friends in 1947 defending the old city with Abdel-Kader Al-Hussainy. He planted Jerusalem deep in the heart of his children. There is no Palestine without Jerusalem. We were entrusted with Jerusalem by Omar Ibn-Al-Khattab and we became Al-Ansar, or the people who will make Muhammad's message victorious, till the end of time, or till we perish.

The thorny issues that will never be resolved by Sharon the Pharaoh; the Right of Return; Jerusalem; and a Palestinian border without a single Israeli soldier.

Jews all over the world enjoy an automatic citizenship to my home. While we have become the new "Abeed" of the Arab nations. Poetic justice. I ask God every day to tell me of my sins and the sins of my fathers in order to deserve this fate.

Palestinian elections united and emboldened their heart. What comes next is the big disappointment. Pharaoh (Sharon) does not believe in justice, otherwise he would've let this people go. And so there will be

another disappointment and another blood bath. But my trusted friend in Ramallah is not worried. He says “it can’t get any worse.”

As for the rest of us, the Palestinians who roam this earth in the Twilight Zone, we will insist that as long as we breathe we exist. And as long as we continue to breathe we know we are winning. Even if no one wants to open up the door and say welcome to the dinner table.

January 29, 2005

Doing God’s Work

We had a heavy snowfall last weekend. I waited at a Stop sign and a van rammed into me. I got out of the vehicle and a black middle aged man came out of the van. His voice was loud and said that I had stopped abruptly, and that’s why he backed into me.

A fuse lit up inside and I felt my hot Mediterranean temper about to explode. But before uttering a single word I excused myself, went back into the vehicle, smoked a cigarette and came back out with serene calmness.

This time he said he was sorry and offered to fix my vehicle. I told him: “I’d like to take this opportunity to become friends and collect some Forgiveness Capital. I don’t want you to fix it. I don’t want anything from you. I forgive you and I hope God will forgive some of my sins against others.”

President George W. Bush is always busy collecting Political Capital and spending it. He told us on TV in October 2000 that racial profiling was wrong. We voted for him. Then, he spent that capital on Ashcroft and Sharon.

He appointed an Arab apologist, Spencer Abraham, in his cabinet so we could not complain while he spent our capital.

In his second crowning on January 20th, he promised to spend all of his political capital fighting Tyranny across the globe. The word Terrorism totally disappeared from his long inaugural speech. Can we conclude that we exited the War on Terror and entered into the War on Tyranny? But “charity always starts at home” and in one’s own heart.

The English say that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.” Bush always believed that he was destined to do God’s work. But God also sends Tsunamis upon people.

Pilgrims in Mecca pelted Satan with stones in the Feast of Sacrifice, or Eid Al-Adha for Muslims, as Bush was taking the oath of office. He placed his hand on the Bible, like George Washington first did back in 1789, and said “so help me God.”

But God in His book says that He helps those who help themselves. Bush always described himself as a “results-oriented” person. So, let’s look at the results of the first four years. His government announced this week an all-time record budget deficit of 427 billion dollars for 2005.

American lives are threatened because of an unnecessary war. A record 37 million Americans live below the poverty line. One third of Americans have no health insurance. The Education system is riddled with MEAP scores and has no idea how to advance knowledge in society. Stem cell research and science stopped so we may appease Reverend Pat Robertson and his “moral” message. These are the tangible results of the first term.

In his mind, President Bush “fixed” the Economy and National Security. Now, he promises to turn his attention to Social Security and “fix” it by sending the money to the hungry wolves on Wall Street. The same people he had jailed a couple of years ago during the corporate scandals saga.

His ambitious agenda extends to the entire IRS Tax Code and he will “fix” it the same way he “fixed” our Civil Rights. Democrats are accused of being the “tax and spend” Party. Bush is teaching Republicans to be proud in becoming the “borrow and spend” Party. This way, when pain comes it will be fast and swift. When banks call in the loans and foreclose on the White House.

America is an Economy. Essentially, that’s what keeps people from killing each other. They tolerate each other so they can make money off of each other. The primary job of the President is to preserve and grow the economy.

But this President was born with the silver spoon in his mouth. He appointed a Mexican immigrant, Carlos Gutierrez, as the new Commerce Secretary. Gutierrez had climbed the ladder from humble

beginnings as a truck driver all the way to the CEO of Kellogg company. But commerce can not advance with a President erecting walls of separation and building barriers between nations and peoples.

Bush is following economic policies that America's Clinton advised other nations not to do, back in the roaring nineties. The Mexican Peso collapsed to one quarter of its value in 1995. The Indonesian Rupiah lost 80 percent of its value in 1997. The US dollar will have to continue its decline against the Euro in order to correct the imbalances in the economy.

This President has an amusing personality and character while he insists on doing God's work in allowing the starving Iraqis to vote. They are to vote on a slate of "good" Iraqis. Why not put a Referendum on Occupation on the ballot? And forget about the slate.

But history is not kind to occupations. Not in an election and not anywhere. The President himself does not pretend to justify it.

America today is teetering on the brink of bankruptcy on all fronts.

This President is obsessed with Iraq the same way the Roman Emperor Nero was obsessed with persecuting Christians. Nero Claudius Caesar initiated the Christian persecution after Rome was burnt. He murdered his own mother and his wife for the love of power. He committed suicide in A.D. 68. He reached the same result that all megalomaniac Emperors inevitably reach. The way Marc Antony and Cleopatra went before him, and the way Adolf Hitler followed them a couple of millennia later. They were all "results-oriented."

Life is a journey. It is a way. Moses pointed to the way. Jesus said follow the way. And Muhammad fashioned the way in his lifetime. Civilization is about the way of human oneness. The way of respecting each other as equals. Good results are a natural outcome of following the righteous way.

On this auspicious occasion, the meek on this earth offer Caesar in the White House a prayer; let go of "political capital" and get on the path of collecting "forgiveness capital."

February 5, 2005

Democracy by the barrel of a gun

Once there was a big chicken who thought she was a dog. She appeared before the chicken masses and barked. The masses clapped, cheered and then retreated to their coops. They felt sorry, more for themselves than for the chicken who dared to be dog.

One day, a fox raided the coop and ate its fill of the screaming chicken. The chicken-dog barked and tried its best to defend the coop but it had no sharp teeth.

Saddam Hussein was a schizophrenic chicken. He was not a Big Dog, as they call big men in hip-hop lingo.

Remember Jay Garner, the first US envoy to Iraq, right after the fall of Baghdad. He had prior experience in successfully re-engineering the Kurdish region of Iraq in 1992.

He had it right. His solution was based on understanding Arab customs and the way they organized themselves. He took notice of the strong family bonds that flowed seamlessly to the tribal leader, who consulted with Sheikhs and pledged his loyalty to a regional Chieftain.

Nation-building is about organizing society. It is not about the construction of roads and sewer plants. Democracy is about participation and not just conducting elections.

Remember Paul Bremer, the second US envoy to Iraq. He was famous for wearing boots with his suit and tie. The boots were a symbol of the kind of democracy his bosses in the Pentagon were determined to install in Iraq.

A democracy by the barrel of a gun. A democracy shoved down the throat of people. A democracy based on fear and violence.

Iraqis believed that freedom always followed liberation. But America did not send an army of lawyers and educators to speak the language of democracy.

The Iraqis only saw American boys with big toys firing big guns that hurt a lot of little people. Iraqis only saw the ugly face of occupation, where dialogue was done by the barrel of a gun.

Let's cut to the chase. Elections in Iraq were not just a good thing. They were the most excellent thing that has happened to Iraq in a long

time. We want to see elections taking place in every country in the Middle East. That is our clear objective as Arab Americans.

We want to see the feathers of Big Chicken, like Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, being plucked. We want to see other chickens roasted at the altar of the people.

We want to see the new Assembly of the Iraqi people draft a constitution that safeguards the rule of the people from aspiring despots. We want to see an Arab government that has protection from a schizophrenic army General, who may wake up one day and decide to lead four tanks to the Presidential palace and take it over. Such stories only happened in the Middle East.

The last century witnessed the emergence of all these chicken-led Banana Republics in the Middle East. The next century will witness the demise of all these false states where the Arab body will mend back into its natural oneness.

But it has to mend locally first and then regionally.

Democracy has to be built on real dialogue and participation. The 275 elected members of the new Iraqi Assembly will have to draft a constitution and make it a living document. They are to conduct general elections shaping the final form of government by December 15, 2005.

The founders of America drafted a Constitution. They had it ratified by as many assemblies of the people as practically possible, at the time. This transformed the document from ink on parchment to a living organism in the bonds and relationships between Americans.

In recent times, however, the ink on parchment had become more revered than the bonds and relationships. America is looking for its own heart in Iraq. Fallujah could well be neighboring Highland Park. The only difference is that Wayne County Sheriff has not called in the National Guards yet.

Legislative assemblies in America, such as City Councils and US Congress, do not pay attention to the spirit of the Constitution, when they draft laws. Most laws passed in America, these days, are based on domestic political squabbles rather than human fairness or a sense of justice.

They reflect the way of the jungle, and the organization of the Animal Kingdom, as a hierarchy of a predator society.

That's why I always say that charity starts at home and in one's own heart first.

But one never knows, sometimes democracy by the barrel of a gun, may well be the right medicine.

February 19, 2005

United States of Arabia

The first time I passed through Dearborn was during Christmas of 1979. I stopped at the South end, took a picture of a small mosque and loved the Arabian Village sign. It was like a little village carved up from the stony mountains of Yemen. I had never been to Yemen till that day.

The second time I passed through Dearborn was during Christmas of 1987. I stopped in at the three or four bakeries on Warren Avenue and had a homemade Molokhia at the cozy Cedarland Restaurant. I fell in love with it. It reminded me of my childhood and the streets of Beirut which I roamed while growing up.

The third time I came to Dearborn was during Christmas of 1992. This time I decided to stay. I watched the streets of Baghdad and mostly from neighborhoods like Al-Kadhimiyya take shape around the newly formed Karbalaa Islamic Center straddling Dearborn and Detroit. I had never been to Iraq till I came to Dearborn.

I love Dearborn because I found in it the Arab world that I was denied as a child. I love Dearborn because it is an experiment of how the Middle East would look like when democracy takes root in it.

The different groups that make up the mosaic of Arabs and Muslims co-exist peacefully with each other. They practice their diverse faith and they help the less fortunate in their community.

Arabs have found respect for their humanity in Dearborn. It is a colorful picture of a United States of Arabia, a second USA. It is a model when Arab states, one day, will erase their artificially-drawn borders and let that body mend into its natural oneness.

The other day, Monday 14, famous as Valentine's day, I watched my romance come to life at the Dearborn Board of Education meeting. More than 50 Arab Americans spoke at the meeting and asked the board to fire a teacher who had insulted the Qur'an in one of his classes. They showed the board that the spirit of the soaring American eagle had awakened in their Muslim veins. The board was spiritually defeated.

The compelling arguments advanced by different community members did not leave a stone unturned. The teacher in question will have to be offered as a token sacrifice at the altar of the people. If not, the demands will grow larger and then the board will have to sacrifice some of its own members to satisfy the thirst of the people.

But my romantic idea of a United States of Arabia comprising 24 countries and some 350 million people is still a far off mirage. The Middle East has a political system comprised of fiefdoms, kingdoms and Banana Republics. The system has a behavior as entrenched as the most powerful systems like Capitalism and Socialism.

The system rules its own people with an iron fist in the name of national security. Israel serves a primary function of being the enemy justifying the militant behavior of regimes. The system refuses to look at itself in the mirror and say that sometimes the greater enemy lies within. It lies within the way we treat each other and the way we organize our relationships with each other.

Lebanese leader, Rafik Al-Hariri, was assassinated this past Monday and all the big powers were quick to point fingers and place blame. The biggest loser in this sad episode is Lebanon and the biggest beneficiary is the enemy of Lebanon. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was quick to point the fingers towards Syria and to call for an International Investigation.

Imagine the reaction in America if Arabs had called for an International Investigation right after the tragic events of 9/11. Internationalizing the Hariri tragedy serves the primary interests of the enemies of Lebanon and may well lead to civil war again. A transparent investigation commissioned by the Lebanese Parliament is the proper course of action to safeguard Lebanon's democracy and allow its people to steer through this crisis.

The people of Lebanon must stay united throughout this crisis and hope must stay alive that other Arab regimes will gradually surrender their powers to the people.

That hope was very much alive in the late nineties when King Hussein died. Then, Hafez Al-Asad of Syria followed him in June 2000, and a few others bit the dust too. But the Superglue that held their asses to the seats of power was somehow passed on to their children.

Then came the disaster of 9/11 and Bush Corporation decided to wage a shortsighted global War on Terror. A war that extended the expiration date of most of the regimes in the Middle East. Now that the War on Terror has become the War on Tyranny, Bush Corporation has declared an open hunting season for Arab regimes.

Of course if Arab regimes fall it is also the fall of Israel as an enemy nation. But the Rice-Sharon axis wants one without the other. Iron curtains and freedom don't mix too well.

Bush loves the way Mahmoud Abbas in the name of Palestinians is going about it. Abbas is headed down a path where he will give everything up before he even gets Gaza. And once he gets what Israel views as its greatest security liability; the Gaza strip, which it gladly wanted to get rid of unilaterally, Abbas will be required to sign away the rights of all Palestinians who live outside of the occupied territories. The very thing that ethnic cleansing could not achieve.

I am a Palestinian. I did not vote for Mahmoud Abbas, not by choice but because I still don't exist in the eyes of Israel. Abbas doesn't speak in my name. Israel must ask for God's forgiveness first and then my forgiveness before it pulls out of any Palestinian land. Then, real peace can be easy because I am ready to forgive if only Israel would ask for it.

The war on Tyranny and Violence must be conducted with one standard applied across the board. The Tyranny and Violence perpetrated by the Israeli regime must be included in America's hunt for peace in the Middle East.

And the hunt has rules. Cowardly acts of violence should not be tolerated by any people as a legitimate tool of dialogue. The hunt has to be a tidal wave by the people. A tsunami of people flowing into the streets of every Arab capital to reclaim it.

That's when the dream of a United States of Arabia will become possible again.

May 7, 2005

Arab Women Rights

The mark of a successful civilization is how much freedom it affords to its women. And how much freedom do Arab women have? Can anyone name a living Arab woman who gained fame in fighting for freedom of women? I can't name one. Are Arab women free to do what they want to do? Does freedom mean sexual liberation? Does freedom come without a cost? Is Arab woman dominated by the wishes of her family? Do Arab women dare speak out? Do Arab women really want any more freedom?

My good friend Don Unis always tells me that Arabs have one asset that will never run out. I guessed that it was their oil. He said no. I said their false bravado. He said no. I said their art of talking so much and saying so little. He said no. I gave up. He said the hips of the Arab woman. He is right. Those hips are a human factory.

Most Arab women are still wedded the good old fashioned way; arranged marriages or through introductions made under close family scrutiny. An Arab woman holds the key of honor to the Arab man. Most of the social problems that plague Arab society stem from the relationship of Arab society with the Arab woman. The Arab woman is bound by endless norms that she must adhere to. Her reputation is everything. Once it is ruined her chances of being part of that society are almost ruined. And her reputation lies in the way she conducts herself with males.

In the pre-Islam days and especially in Mecca where all cultures met, Arab women walked around in the markets baring their breasts. Arab men viewed women as prized possessions. Whenever a man wanted to honor a guest he offered him his "wife" to sleep with. Men had many wives and there was no limit on how many wives a man can have. His money bought him as many women slaves as he could afford.

Back then there were two types of Arab women; the slaves that formed the majority and a very small class of highly dignified women supported by powerful families. The dignified women formed the link of alliances between big tribes. Their demands were met by the

husbands because they had an entire alliance of commercial interest riding on the relationship. These women rarely appeared in the marketplace. They stayed away from the sight of common men and if they ever had to go out to the street they clothed themselves from head to toe. Their clothing and their brisk manner of step gave an indication to other men that they were women of great honor backed up by powerful tribes.

Common men did not dare look or interact with the fully clothed women. There was retribution to having an accidental innocent interaction with these women. They gave a very clear signal to men that they were not approachable.

Men of great honor, like Omar Bin Al-Khattab, viewed female offsprings as either a curse or a blessing. A female baby was a curse if she brought destruction of livelihood or loss of wealth with her birth. Thus, men like Omar took their female babies out to the desert and buried them alive.

Islam liberated women and slaves and made them equal to all men. Later on in his life when he became the Khalifah (Successor to the Prophet Muhammad), Omar recalled with tears dripping down his cheeks how he buried his baby girl in the sand. His girl loved him so much that she was cleaning the flying sand off his face as he was burying her.

Women in Islam were told to cover the parts of their anatomy that caused temptation to man. Walking with bare breasts in the streets was no longer acceptable. Then, great alliances were made by the Prophet through his thirteen marriages. Many great tribes became his relatives by marriage. In order to emulate the prophet and gain more of his favor they began tying their honor with his honor. Thus, these tribes began ordering their women to dress from head to toe and to cover themselves, and to act like the dignified class of women did, in the days prior to Islam.

And so the tradition of women covering themselves endeared and found its way into the Muslim culture. In the middle ages and about five hundred years ago women of all cultures and on all continents were covering their hair and wearing lots of clothes. Even the statue of liberty that stands as a symbol of freedom is fully clothed from head to toe.

Being fully clothed gave dignity to women and signaled to other men that they demanded to be treated with respect. Wearing a Hijab (head cover) is more of a cultural thing than something ordained by the Qur'an. It has become a highly contested symbol in recent years where some groups use it to force a society backward while countries like France want to remove it from public life in order to better assimilate their sizable African Arab population into their mainstream.

A Christian friend from Baghdad told me that his mother and sisters don't dare go out of the house without a Hijab. They are afraid of abuse by religious zealots or being raped by American soldiers. Women in Iraq have gotten the worst deal out of this occupation-liberation mess.

But Arab women must stand up for themselves and demand their freedom again. Last week a woman in Afghanistan was beheaded in public. She was accused of Zinah or Adultery. I was under the impression that the Taliban regime was removed by America. But I guess "talibanizing" a society does not come from regimes or governments. It is a force stronger than any regime and it is sweeping through the Muslim world like a hurricane.

The Muslim extremists who are championing the "rebirth" of Islam are using the Hijab and the obsessive control of women as weapons of mass destruction. They have hijacked the spirit of Islam and turned it into a set of rules of conduct to be enforced against the Muslim woman.

Of course, Muslim women don't have the guts to say what I have just said. They comply with the rules of a society governed by powerful men. Wearing a Hijab or not wearing it is not the issue. My own mother wears it while my sister is against it. I support both. I support their right to choose. I support freedom of expression.

June 18, 2005

Chicken dreams in a banana republic

In one of my forays to the Middle East I decided to start a business. I researched and found that the average price of a kilogram of chicken was \$1 and I could produce it for less than \$0.12. It made good business sense.

I was in a Banana Republic and the real name is irrelevant as it could well be any country in the Middle East, for all intents and purposes. Besides, I still want to be able to go to that country and I am scared of mentioning its name because I have been interrogated by its secret police in a previous adventure. I have seen what they can do to a proud man.

I wanted to build a chicken farm and become the Frank Purdue of Arabia. Building the chicken coup was no big deal. There were plenty of cheap Egyptian laborers that can put up a block building overnight. Bringing water to the god-forsaken piece of land that my family owned proved to be a more challenging task. Finally, I settled on digging a well. It was much cheaper than trying to buy water and truck it over long miles of unpaved barren land.

I found myself going back to the dreaded government agencies that always said No, regardless of the nature of the question. I wanted to do things the right way. I applied for a permit to open up a chicken coup and raise homegrown chicks. They sent me to the health department which sent me to the taxes and revenue department. They in turn sent me to the Ministry of Interior to get a security clearance. I applied for that clearance, put the required stamps on the application and got the required signatures as I toured the corridors of the Secret Police or Al-Mukhabarat fortress. It brought back bad memories but this time I found the staff more helpful and less militant.

They instructed me to come back in a couple of weeks. Meanwhile, one of the Lieutenants in that building liked my fresh approach and can-do attitude. He guessed that I came from America. I told him about my project and we went out to lunch to talk about it. He advised me that I was a “green-horn gringo” who will be eaten up alive in the web of that country’s nepotism. He told me to go back to America before I wasted more of my time and money, and begged me to take him to America.

I was determined to prove to myself that building a business in the Middle East was as straightforward as it was in America. I had convinced myself that people were helpless because they did not know American business management and marketing techniques. I refused to believe that governments were the source of people’s helplessness.

I bought a small stick shift pick-up and began going to the land every day to plan the structures and bond with my chicken dream. I got to know the bedouins who grazed their cattle in the land and they

speculated that I would hit water if I dug five meters below. They hated government and they raised their own chicken and lamb without permits or taxes.

But I wanted access to the big city's market. The Ministry of Interior called and referred me to the Ministry of Trade. I was informed that the price of chicken was regulated by the government in order to protect the consumer. No problem. They told me that I would not be allowed to charge retail outlets more than \$0.70 per Kilo. The project was still feasible and there was big money to be made in raising chicken.

I went to a small live chicken store in my neighborhood. I picked a live chicken and the attendant killed it and cleaned it for me. He charged me \$0.62 per Kilo. I was surprised and asked him where he got his chicken from. He said from a chicken farm. I was pleased that market forces were at play keeping prices even below the government's cap.

I asked the store owner if he would buy my chicken if I ever offered them to him. He said he would not pay more than \$0.30 per Kilo. O.K. there was still money to be made in raising chicken. But he could not buy more than a dozen chickens a day.

I went to the supermarket and found that most of the frozen chicken came from Bulgaria and it sold for \$0.50 per Kilo. So, I thought I could kill and clean the chicken and then sell it frozen. I asked the Ministry of Trade about frozen chicken and they said there was only one authorized importer of chicken, in order to protect the consumer.

They referred me to the Ministry of Agriculture to inquire about homegrown frozen chicken. There, I was informed that only one licensed facility was authorized in the entire banana republic to do massive chicken slaughter and cleaning operations. I asked for an application to open another one. That's when the bureaucrat raised his eyebrows and said: you have to talk to the Prime Minister about that.

So, I went to the Prime Minister's office but the security guards almost arrested me for trying to get an appointment with him to discuss the chicken situation in the country. I finally came across an elected member of the parliament who waited in line for public transportation in what they called "service" cabs, or taxis where five people shared the fare and the ride.

The “congressman” laughed when I told him about the chicken issue. He informed me that there was a law on the books which gave exclusive rights to one company to operate a chicken slaughterhouse. The company was in partnership with the feudal lords, the so-called high-up politicians, or the real owners of the fabricated republic. He gave me a brotherly advice which stuck in my mind till the day I die. He said you need to find a Sheikh or an Ameer (prince) to be your partner if you want to secure a business in this country.

I asked if he could sponsor a new law. He said: “do you think we have a Parliament like your Congress in America? Here we are not allowed to initiate laws. We only discuss what the prime minister and his government dictates to us.”

All my chicken dreams vanished in that taxi. I felt like the rest of the citizens who sat in that car; helpless and will always be helpless and hopeless.

March 25, 2006

Time to end the occupation of Iraq

They say that one eventually becomes what he despises the most. Teenagers who swear that they will never become like their parents grow up to find themselves repeating the words of their parents to their own teenagers. The cycle of life catches up with everyone lifting youthful civilizations up and sending older ones to their graves. The American civilization is going through its natural life cycle and its transformation to an imperial democracy would make George Washington turn in his grave. America stands today for everything his revolution opposed.

If Washington lived today US foreign policy would have his revolution classified as a terrorist organization. He opposed occupation and led a resistance movement to fight British troops. He ambushed soldiers and blew up British supply lines. He received aid from an unfriendly foreign nation, France, and propagated an ideology of independence.

This week marked the third anniversary of the Iraq war and it was highlighted by anti-war demonstrations all over the world and pro-war speeches by President Bush and Prime Minister Blair. They have a plan for success and a strategy for victory. Bush spent the better part of this week explaining his strategy and reminding the nation that this is a

major part of the global war on terror. He described the terrorists as “Islamofascists” with a totalitarian ideology that they want to impose on the rest of the world.

His strategy is simple: kill the terrorists, train the Iraqi army, form a new Iraqi government and then everything will fall into place. As to part one: the terrorists, Bush won’t listen to anyone who tells him that “there is plenty more of where they came from.” The more Arabs are killed whether they are terrorists or not the more bad blood ensues and that leads to more recruits for terrorism. A conservative estimate puts the death toll of Iraqis in the past three years near 50,000. The terrorists are classified into three groups: Saddam loyalists and their Sunni supporters; foreign terrorists consisting of Zarqawi, Al-Qaida and their gangs; and Shi’a terrorists manipulated by Imam Muqtada Al-Sadr and Iran.

The terrorists just can not be simply killed because they are a direct function of the foreign occupation. Anyone who subscribes to the idea that occupation leads to peace is just simply wrong. Freedom is by far the strongest instinctual aspiration of every human being. Occupation creates resistance. Therefore, peace begins the day occupation ends. The longer American troops stay in Iraq the worse things will get. Foreign troops remain the core of the problem.

Former Iraqi Prime Minister, Iyad Alawi, stated this week that Iraq was in fact in a civil war. Sunnis, Shi’a and Kurds and all others have lived in that part of the world for thousands of years. They will use sectarian violence to advance their own narrow agendas for a limited period of time while they jockey for power. But the fabric of society will not tear if American troops withdrew today. Most of the sectarian infighting that we see nowadays will disappear soon after the occupying troops leave.

As for part two of Bush’s strategy: train the Iraqi army to take over. Paul Bremer dismantled the Iraqi army in July 2003 thereby sparking off the insurgency. Now, they are accelerating the recruitment process and trying to fix what they broke by bringing back some of the experienced soldiers they had alienated. And part three of Bush’s strategy which is forming a unity government depends on the approval and full participation of Iran. Bush stated that he instructed his Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to “inform” the Iranians of the American position. Iran’s elected loyalists in the Iraqi parliament are prepared to block the formation of a new government indefinitely. The

US has no choice but to negotiate with Iran on the formation of a new Iraqi government.

What did America accomplish in the past three years in Iraq? Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD's): we did not find any. Killing Al-Qaida terrorists: the occupation bred more terrorists than the world can handle. Price of oil was \$30 per barrel before the war and now it is \$60 per barrel. 2,300 American soldiers killed. Less electricity. Less drinking water. The Iraqi infrastructure is almost destroyed and entire cities like Fallujah and Samaraa lie in ruins. Democratic elections that did not bear the fruits of a stable government capable of providing security, basic services, jobs for the unemployed masses, healthcare or education. Cost so far: \$400 billion. Benefit: Zero (except for Halliburton and other contractors close to the administration).

A recent paper published by two top US scholars concluded that the greatest beneficiary of the invasion of Iraq is Israel. It also concluded that America's foreign policy in the Middle East runs against its own interests.

What is the definition of victory in Iraq? The closest model we can find is Afghanistan which is hailed as a "success" story. This week an Afghan man named Abdur Rahman faced the death penalty because he converted from Islam to Christianity. Afghanistan's courts follow a mixture of civil and Islamic (Shari'a) law.

The Afghan people do not speak Arabic and they do not understand the Qur'an which states very clearly that "there is no coercion in faith" (Surah 2, Verse 256). But I thought Bush said that totalitarian "Islamofascists" are the enemies of the civilized world. I guess the people who rule Afghanistan today are friendly Taliban and they are pro-American. Democracy in Afghanistan has produced a rule by the illiterate mob and for the illiterate Talibanized mob.

US foreign policy needs to invest its money in revamping the educational system in most parts of the Muslim world and to teach Muslims the values of their own religion. It needs to focus on exporting human values instead of wasting billions in wars, destruction and corrupt puppet regimes. We are still doing the same old thing of replacing one hostile dictatorship with a Pro-American one. We can not reform the Muslim world by constantly attacking it militarily.

The war on terror began with policies of human rights abuse and it has not corrected a single injustice in the Arab or Muslim world. It is so

sad to see America so stubborn in propagating ignorance, greed, incompetence and the rule of the corrupt few over the great masses. It is exporting the values of an imperial democracy that it has turned into. The leaders in the White House are drunk with excessive power and the opposition has no plan.

The genuine war on terror will begin when America begins to correct the immense injustices all over the Muslim world. The road to stability and peace in the Middle East starts with ending the occupation of Iraq and Palestine. It is just that simple and there is no other way around it.