

ONLINE JOURNAL™

www.onlinejournal.com

Review

State Terrorism and the United States: From Counterinsurgency to the War on Terrorism

By Frederick H. Gareau

Clarity Press, 2004

ISBN: 0932863396

Paperback, 296pp

Reviewed by Tracy McLellan

Online Journal Guest Writer

July 13, 2004—In the United States, practically by birthright, we are supplied with all the consumables our digestion will handle, and then some. By birthright also, we inherit a public sphere every last trace of which is or soon will be branded, goading us to satisfy every hunger, and creating many which we would never consider. We have a president [sic] who can open his mouth only to lie and dissemble and a Congress in which this talent is prerequisite and institutionalized. Ignorance is bliss as Orwell had it.

Imagine what our world might look like instead if all the energy and resources that go now to encourage our insatiable lust for more of every tangible material manifestation were rather concentrated on bringing a modicum of a decent standard of living to the 3 billion people, half the world's population, who now survive on the equivalent of US \$2 a day. On a smaller scale certainly such a political arrangement has been attempted, and invariably in conspiracy with US power, murdered in its infancy.

Before launching into an objectively scathing critique of US foreign policy, Frederick H. Gareau cites as his own the Archbishop of Sao Paolo: "This entire book is written in blood and with much love for our country." Would that I were so noble.

Whenever US masters have got a whiff of such socialism anywhere, they have outright or clandestinely set the military dogs loose to subvert it in every way imaginable. Such an economic arrangement has never been allowed to succeed or fail on its own merits. Even the Soviet Union, with all its faults, suffered clandestine warfare and sabotage as early in its history as the early 1920s by the US and allied forces, terrified that an example other than capitalism might serve as an alternative economic model. Such sabotage is practically as old as the republic itself.

To date, and as far as one can see in the future, any attempt at a socialist government is bound to meet the same fate as governments described herein by Gareau.

Better late than never I guess, but it is almost embarrassing for me to admit how perfect this book was to me as someone who only became more than peripherally engaged and interested in politics and especially US foreign policy in the late 1990s. Rebels, contras, Sandanistas, leftists, guerrillas, insurgents, counterinsurgents, terrorists, communists, all these terms were confusing and difficult to hold and fully understand in context.

State Terrorism and the United States is an enlighteningly complex yet simple exposition of the state-terror in which the US has been engaged and complicit. Sadly, what it amounts to is where the repressed have organized to better their living conditions they are branded "communist," "terrorist," "rebel." *Ipsa*

facto their activities—union organizing, education, strikes, agitating for better wages and working conditions—are branded “insurgency,” a word sinister enough to warrant any reprisal:

US military doctrine . . . defined insurgency as ‘illegal opposition to any existing government’—the scope of subversive activities ranging from passive resistance, illegal strikes, demonstrations, to large-scale guerrilla operations. The communist enemy was pictured as being pernicious, powerful, and perverted, something that must be annihilated. By extension, opposition to the status quo was put in the same bag to be crushed as well. But in reality, much of the opposition was by no means either communist or armed and violent. The world of counterinsurgency thus is a stark and bipolar one . . . with no neutral middle ground. This paradigm has been resurrected by the Bush administration in its war on terrorism. One side in both counterinsurgency and the war on terrorism is the free world; on the other dark side is the world of communist treachery and slavery—or in contemporary terms, of terrorism, depicted as baseless irrational hatred. There is no place for any mediating conceptualization designed to meet the needs of the poor.

In each of six case studies—the School of the Americas and El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, South Africa, and Indonesia—Gareau examines and answers with a bracing honesty three basic questions: did the government commit state terrorism? how much of the terror was committed by the state, and how much by private guerrillas? And, was the country that perpetrated terror upon its own citizens supported by the United States? Anyone with a basic understanding of US foreign policy can intuit the answers. Still, Gareau’s analysis is revealing and educational.

In addition to the six main case studies, Gareau also takes brief inventories of US policy in Cambodia, Iraq, Colombia, Nicaragua, the Congo, Iran and elsewhere. Inevitably we discover that no country was too vicious or brutal to receive US aid so long as it opposed the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Such countries were innocuously labeled “democratic,” with all that intimates. Similar errors are being made in the name of fighting the war on terror, says Gareau. The same methods used historically to combat what the propaganda model holds as terrorism, are not used upon the far greater state terrorism perpetrated by our friends and allies, invariably in collusion with the United States. Under the rubric of this paradigm, terrorism is by definition something “they” do, and thusly only then resisted, vilified, prevented and attacked. When we and our friends engage in the very same activity, often to an aggravated degree, it is called something else entirely.

Several of the 21 truth commissions that Gareau notes have been established worldwide to investigate terrorism provide focus to much of the material here. Understanding, he says is the first step toward contrition, and thusly, prevention.

Truth commissions usually operate under the “two-devils principle.” This examines atrocities and violations of both liberation and counterinsurgency movements. Under this authority says Gareau, liberation movements are often judged more leniently. As this study shows, they are often guilty of far less barbarity. Liberation movements’ cause, often that of throwing off the yoke of economic and violent repression, also earns leniency. However, liberation movements that use unjust means to achieve their ends are not exonerated of perpetrating atrocities and violations. Conversely, state-sponsored terrorism is usually far more culpable for several reasons. It is usually guilty of vastly more terrorism; the terrorism is more brutal and monstrous; and worse, is employed for unjust ends.

Much of US foreign policy, including its wide support for right-wing dictators during the Cold War, was and is predicated on the Root Doctrine, says Gareau. This doctrine, promulgated in 1922 by Elihu Root, Nobel prize winner and former US secretary of state, said a sovereign state had a right to “prevent a condition of affairs in which it will be too late to protect itself.” According to Root, this justified support of dictators because the populations in those countries were incapable of democracy. This doctrine proved bloody in practice when the goal, achieved with the success at least of avoiding nuclear holocaust, was deterrence, containment and non-proliferation. Under terms of the Bush administration’s National Security Strategy of 2002, preemption and counter-proliferation threaten aggression, and represent a severe setback for the development of international law, according to Gareau.

Finally, Gareau makes recommendations for preventing terrorism. The US, he says, should oppose terrorism in all its guises, and not just where it threatens its narrowly defined interests. It should change the name of the war against to the defense against terrorism. It should quit its aid of state terrorism, which engenders much hatred of and inspires more terrorism against the United States. Terrorism should be treated as criminal, and reacted to as such, rather than by acts of war. Prisoners like those at Guantanamo should be afforded the rights of criminals. Particularly salient in light of Europe's recent refusal to even consider it, a negotiating posture ought to be adopted to ameliorate the grievances of terrorists and potential terrorists. This should be especially true in the case of those with grievances against Israel, says Gareau, whose close relationship with the United States fuels much terrorist hatred. The living standards of the world's poor should be raised.

In perhaps the only approval of Bush administration policies, or past Democratic administrations for that matter, Gareau affirms expanding and reforming intelligence agencies, improving security of air and seaports, and increased regulation on the transfer of money from country to country. Contrary to the adamant protestations of the Bush administration, however, Gareau says the US should eagerly join the International Criminal Court. It should more readily participate with international institutions such as the International Atomic Energy Commission and the United Nations. It should not undermine human rights. It should remedy as far as possible the victims of state terrorism it has supported in the past. And, a truth commission for the United States should be created so that the American public knows what has been done in its name.

There ought to be books like this, over and over again and again, perhaps only books like this, until the US especially, and the whole world, rather than just that part of it that apparently already knows and is so weak it lashes out in terror, begins to understand of the terrorism, repression, and illegal imperialism that issues from the very heart of the government of the country that likes to fashion itself the furthest representative and standard bearer of democracy. This book is a heady communication with conscience. And these suggested remedies of Gareau, a doctor of international relations and organizations are reasonable, if not brilliant. Thusly, their chance of US adoption is nil.

This review originally appeared in the May, 2004 FORsooth, monthly newsletter of the Louisville chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. You may reach Tracy McLellan at tracymacl@yahoo.com.