

# War, Racism, and Reverse Robin Hood

Rania Masri

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*Thank you for this invitation.*

This month marks the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9-11 criminal attacks

This month also marks the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. When President Bush was in New Orleans recently he met the Mayor at a school named for Dr. King.

This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his murder.

Unfortunately, these three anniversaries are connected.

How so?

Let's start with 9-11.

After that horrific crime, President Bush Jr. responded by declaring a 'permanent war against terrorism', a "crusade" against evil.

On September 14, the Senate voted 98-0 for a war resolution, authorizing the president "to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons..."

The President determines. That's quite a lot of faith in the President.

In his speech then, George Bush effectively declared permanent war -- war without temporal or geographic limits; war without clear goals; war against a vaguely defined and constantly shifting enemy in more than 60 countries, including the U.S. He summarized his doctrine as eloquently as he can muster when he said: 'you're either with us or against us'

He said: "Freedom itself is under attack," Bush said, and he was right. We have since lost many of our most cherished liberties in a frenzy of paranoid legislation. The government now taps our phones, reads our email and seizes our credit card records without court order. The government now detains and deports immigrants without cause or trial. And it uses foreign agents to spy on American citizens.

And there is more:

The Military Commissions Act of 2006 (MCA) ushered in military commission law for US citizens and non-citizens alike. Text in the MCA allows for the institution of a military alternative to the constitutional justice system for "any person" arbitrarily deemed to be an enemy of the state, regardless of American citizenship.

**And more.** The John Warner Defense Authorization Act of 2007 allows the president to move toward martial law. The president now can deploy military troops anywhere in the United States and take control of state-based National Guard units without the consent of the governor or local authorities in order to "suppress public disorder."

To save freedom, the warmongers have destroyed it

Since then, the wars for 'freedom and democracy' have been ongoing. Wars Afghanistan and Iraq are both still raging.

And, in another Orwellian spin, in the summer of 2005, one firm – called AngelouEconomics – argued that the Bush administration's ever-expanding 'war on terror' shouldn't be seen as a problem. It argued that President Bush's new strategy doctrine "placed the U.S. on a permanent war footing." And this was - a golden business opportunity.

War as a business opportunity. A golden business opportunity.

Folks in NC took note. Last December, Lt. Gov. Beverly Purdue announced the launch of the N.C. Military Foundation, a pioneering public-private collaboration aimed at dramatically boosting North Carolina's take in the spoils of war.

In other words, if war is a business opportunity, then let's make sure NC takes a bigger piece of the pie. Such is the philosophy.

What are the costs to this? Of making our state increasingly dependent on the business of war?

When our financial security – or, more specifically – when the illusion of our financial security becomes tied with up with the policy of war, then won't we become all the more eager and supportive of war?

In the process, which ideas will be silenced? Whose lives will be pushed aside?

While NC's Lt. Governor has been pushing to make NC even friendlier to the 'military-industrial complex,' more and more North Carolinians – and other Americans -- have become opposed to the war on Iraq.

An October 2006 poll by the Institute for Southern Studies found that 57% of residents in 13 Southern states felt the U.S. "should have stayed out of Iraq." This finding was echoed in January 2007, when a Public Policy Polling survey found 57% of North Carolinians are opposed to escalating the Iraq war, and a plurality – 37% – want U.S. troops to come home "immediately."

Anti-war sentiment is even felt in places like Fayetteville, home of Fort Bragg: a 2005 poll found most respondents (44%) thought the Iraq war "wasn't worth it."

So, do we make money out of a business of war that the majority of Americans are against? As one NC Iraq war marine vet said: I think it's something to be ashamed about to say that we have to rely on a system that kills other people in order for us to live in the state of North Carolina

What have been the costs of this 'permanent war' thus far?

Let's talk about money.

The US defense/war budget has increased 41 percent since 2001. Bush recently demanded another \$50 billion to fund the war and occupation of Iraq. That's in addition to the \$147 billion he already requested.

Almost \$200 billion in addition to what has already been spent.

The National Priorities Project, a non-profit budget watchdog, estimated that, as of March 2007, the United States will have accrued \$378 billion in debt to finance the war.

\$378 billion in debt for the war on Iraq.

Not including the standard costs of military operations, like soldiers' pay. Not including potential future costs - such as future medical care for soldiers and veterans wounded in the war. Not including the additional interest payments on the national debt that taxpayers will have to cover.

So, conservatively speaking then, we're talking about approximately \$578 billion.

Thus far.

If we include the future costs of medical care for veterans, rebuilding the US military from wear and tear, and the interest payments on the debt to pay for the war, then, according to Linda Bilmes, Assistant Secretary of Commerce in the Clinton Administration, and Joseph Stiglitz, a former chief economist at the World Bank and Nobel Prize recipient, the costs of the Iraq war alone will be more than \$2 trillion.

More than \$2 trillion. What does that mean?

Money spent in one place is money that could have spent somewhere else.

The cost to NC taxpayers alone is \$12.3 billion. What does that mean to NC?

Annual NC Budget – Iraq War =

- 2,549,642 people with health care or 5,677,670 children with health care
- or 2,675,711 scholarships for university students
- or 262,688 elementary school teachers
- or 238,456 music and arts teachers
- or 9,792,193 homes with renewable electricity

Just for us here in NC.

What about nationally? Imagine what could be done nationally with that money? Every day, we spend \$720 million on the Iraq War. Every minute, we spend \$500,000 on the war on Iraq. Every minute.

How do we wrap our minds around these priorities? How do we make sense of these choices?

“One single Stinger missile costs \$40,000 – or roughly 30% more than the income of the average American family, nearly twice the income of the average black American family, and about five times more than the so-called poverty line [(Source: Military and CIA experts Dunnigan and Nofi, in Derrick Jensen, author of a ‘language older than words’)]

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that “war is an enemy of the poor.”

Clearly so – with the priorities that are made by the Administration and Congress (Democrats and Republicans) – and the priorities that we, the silent majority, allow them to make.

War is an enemy of the poor.

And this enemy called war not only deprives the poor of moneys that are desperately needed, but deliberately encourages poor (primarily from rural communities) and people of color to join the military.

- As it stands, NC is 3<sup>rd</sup> in the country in the number of active military personnel. So, it comes as no surprise that in the wake of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, North Carolina communities and base towns have been devastated and destabilized by a steady stream of war casualties, including the state’s injured soldiers returning to overburdened veteran medical facilities.

More than 3800 US military personnel killed. Almost half from towns of less than 25,000 people. Small towns. 90 killed from North Carolina.

And the injured. A ratio of 7 injured to each 1 killed.

“Government medical facilities are currently overwhelmed by the needs of soldiers injured in Iraq,” Bilmes and Siglitz write. “Some 144,000 of them sought care from the VA in the first quarter of 2006 – 23 percent more than the Bush administration had estimated for the entire year!”

The soldiers are wounded and waiting. Waiting for care between 9 to 16 months. For a war that the country does not even want. For a war the country can't even afford.

There are other injuries.

Mental health.

- An extensive examination of mental health in the military has found that soldiers who bore the brunt of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering a mounting toll of post-traumatic stress, alcoholism and family breakdown,
- The study, which was published in the British Medical Journal, found that one in four had “severe” alcohol problems, compared with 10% of those deployed for less than five months.”
- “The researchers found that those deployed for longer and those who were uncertain about when they would return home were more likely to suffer mental distress. ... An association was found between deployment for more than a year in the past three years and mental health that might be explained by exposure to combat.”

And the Children?

- A report in the New Scientist that the “[children of \[US\] soldiers deployed in war zones are suffering higher rates of maltreatment](#),” a three-year study of US Army families has found. The rate of overall child maltreatment by the civilian partners of soldiers increases by over 40% while their husbands serve in combat zones, while cases of specific neglect rise almost threefold. ...
- As of late May, 40% of the 263,000 US troops deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq were parents.”

There are other lives missing from this cruel, racist, classist equation.

- What about the people who live in those “combat zones”? They are “uncertain” about when they will be able to have their “home returned” and the foreign troops leave. They are the ones witnessing their friends and family members killed, their neighborhoods blockaded. Their future has been limited to “live through the day.” What is their mental health status? What about their children?
- What about their lives?

In Iraq:

2004 - About 100,000 Iraqi civilians - half of them women and children - have died in Iraq since the invasion, mostly as a result of airstrikes by coalition forces, according to the first reliable study of the death toll from Iraqi and US public health experts.

2006: The death toll among Iraqis as a result of the US-led invasion had reached an estimated 655,000, a study in the Lancet medical journal reported

What will it be in 2008?

In one month – just this past month – 1,800 Iraqis killed

Recently, 40,000 – unidentified mass grave

More than 22,000 Iraqis are detained by the US Army – without charge, without trial

100,000 Iraqis fleeing the country every month.

And all the while, the bombings continue. At an increased rate. More bombs now than before. According to the Associated Press, there has been a five-fold increase in the number of bombs dropped on Iraq during the first six months of 2007 than over the same period in 2006. More than 30 tons of those have been cluster weapons, which take an especially heavy toll on civilians

Numbers. Numbers. Numbers lose their meaning without a story, without a context. So imagine this...

- The news on the radio, an Iraqi refugee recently wrote, recently described a village southeast of Baghdad, where the Euphrates River makes a long, wide curve. There, roughly 30 bodies a day wash up on the shore, or are caught in the fishermen's nets. Families from Baghdad come to this village to look for their missing loved ones when the security situation permits. People are forbidden to eat fish from this part of the river, even the river carp used in the Iraqi national dish, masgouf. This is because the fish have begun to feed on the corpses.

And imagine this...

A 14-year-old girl raped. Gang-raped. Then killed. And Burned. Her parents and sister were also killed.

Her name was Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi.

Four US soldiers were charged.

One convicted of conspiracy to commit rape and four counts of felony murder received a sentence recently of “110 years in prison with the possibility of parole after 10 years.”

110 years with the possibility of parole after 10 years?? How does that work?

And this in the same country where there is the 3-strikes-and-you're out policy, a law that imposes a mandatory life sentence \*without parole\* on offenders convicted of certain crimes. And what are those crimes? [As former and current prosecutors in Washington State explained](#): “An 18-year old high school senior pushes a classmate down to steal his Michael Jordan \$150 sneakers — Strike One; he gets out of jail and shoplifts a jacket, pushing aside the clerk as he runs out of the store — Strike Two; he gets out of jail, straightens out, and nine years later gets in a fight in a bar and intentionally hits someone, breaking his nose — criminal behavior, to be sure, but hardly the crime of the century, yet it is Strike Three. He is sent to prison for the rest of his life.”

Crazy? Yes.

Malcolm X said: If violence is wrong in America, violence is wrong abroad. Our justice system disagrees.

But there is more. Let us remember that the victim of the gang rape - the 14-year-old child - and her parents and younger sister were Iraqis. In Iraq. Under U.S. occupation. So, the soldiers get a mere slap on the wrist (what else do we call a possibility of parole after 10 years?), and the policy of “acceptable killings” continue. So long as the victims are Iraqis.

What is the military policy, the military rules of engagement?

“[After marines shot and killed 24 Iraqi civilians](#)... Capt. Kathryn Navin, a lawyer who briefs Marines in Iraq before they go into combat, testified that it is permissible to shoot and kill people fleeing a roadside bomb attack even if they are unarmed and no proof exists that they were involved in the attack.”

Fleeing a roadside bomb attack? Wouldn't you flee after a bomb attack?

Is it just soldiers? No.

“[At the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003](#), there was one number that was crucial to American military officials as they planned airstrikes. “The magic number was 30,” said Marc Garlasco, who was the Pentagon's chief of high-value targeting at the start of the war. “That means that if you hit 30 as the anticipated number of civilians killed, the airstrike had to go to Rumsfeld or Bush personally to sign off.” If the expected number of civilian deaths was less than 30, however, neither the president nor the secretary of defense needed to know. Four years later, the U.S. military still has rules in place that *permit the killing* of civilians in airstrikes.”

It is all so clear: killing civilians, raping children, burning homes - all this is acceptable during a war of “liberation and democracy”. So, long as those men don't commit three minor crimes in the US, no big deal. And in the process, the cost of this war deprives – further deprives – communities at home of their rights and needs.

It is not only lives that are silenced.

It is also ideas that are silenced.

To this day, it is virtually impossible to see, hear or read the many people who opposed the war before it started in the mainstream media.

It would be bad business to give space to those voices.

There are priorities in Iraq – similar to the priorities in the US

Green Zone -- American embassy, [the largest](#) on the planet, being constructed on a 104-acre stretch of land in the heart of Baghdad's [embattled Green Zone](#)

- *Costs \$592 million* to build – and costs \$1.2 billion per year to maintain.
- unlike almost any other US construction project in Iraq, it is coming in on budget and on time.
- Btw: The enduring monument to US liberation and democracy in Iraq is being built by forced labor. Contractors subcontracting to the US State Department are using bait-and-switch recruiting practices to smuggle Asian workers into brutal and inhumane labor camps—in the middle of the US-controlled Green Zone.
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- Compare that to Iraq

- only half of all planned electricity, water and sewage projects are complete, while nearly a third in the electricity sector alone have yet to begin. And, while nearly \$15 billion has been paid out on all Iraq reconstruction contracts, 20% of health projects remain incomplete, as do nearly 50% of projects in the transportation and communication sectors.
- the term “complete” can be misleading. many projects given this label by other U.S. agencies were in fact poorly built, badly run, and mismanaged

These priorities in Iraq... well, unfortunately, we see them operating in New Orleans, post-Katrina.

What has happened in New Orleans two-years after the disaster that-could-have-been-avoided?

Out of the \$116 billion in Katrina funds allocated, less than 30% has gone towards long-term rebuilding—and less than half of that 30% has been spent, much less reached those most in need. Much of the Gulf Coast is still in crisis. Billions of federal recovery money remains bottled up or has been squandered due to red tape, failures of oversight and misguided priorities.

“The President says he’s written a ‘big check’ for the Gulf Coast, but for the over 60,000 families still in FEMA trailers, they must be wondering if the check bounced,” said Jeffrey Buchanan of the RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights.

But it is worse than simply money being squandered and money not being spent.

Tracie Washington, president of The Louisiana Justice Institute and a lifelong resident of New Orleans, recently said that only a quarter of the more than 5,000 affordable housing units in New Orleans are filled.

Why are  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the housing units empty?

“There is a feeling by our government that public housing of old needs to be dismantled, buildings shut.”

She describes the plan by which public housing will be converted to “mixed-income” developments: “Some of these developments that are closed down took in no water. But the decision was made to take advantage of an opportunity. Hurricane Katrina came. ‘Look what we can do. We can keep these people away from here, bring in the bulldozers, tear down this housing.’”

It is not just renters.

Private housing is being demolished as well. Washington described how the city instituted a stunning policy to allow the legal demolition of homes. Whereas once homeowners would have at least 120 days and several layers of appeals to prevent their homes from being demolished, Nagin instituted an “Imminent Health Threat Demolition” ordinance. He now gives residents only 30 days to stop demolition.

Of the more than 12,000 people previously in the lower 9th Ward, only about 400 live there now.. Where once there was a dense, vibrant African-American neighborhood, there are tall marsh grass, vacant lots and destroyed churches and schools. A few isolated, damaged brick homes remain.

Curtis Muhammad, a longtime resident of New Orleans and a member of People’s Organizing Committee, believes the economic interests driving the failing reconstruction must be investigated. “People see [Donald] Trump down here trying to buy real estate, the big tycoons. The gated communities are growing faster and faster. Look at public housing. They could have knocked that out in a week if they wanted to, cleaned it up. That’s a lot of people that they could have just brought home. You can’t explain that.”

Two years after Katrina, as Bush flew from the bayou to Baghdad, a People’s Hurricane tribunal-putting every level of government on trial-was wrapping up in New Orleans. A group was selling T-shirts there that reads: “Don’t believe the hype. Gulf Coast recovery is not ‘slow’-it is a privatization scheme that takes away our homes, schools, hospitals and human rights.” Mission accomplished?

Privatization. That scheme began almost immediately after Katrina.

Before FEMA arrived, before any health agencies arrived, Heavily armed paramilitary mercenaries from the Blackwater private security firm arrived – ‘deputized’ by the Louisiana governor.

They were paid \$350 a day plus expenses

They operate w/o any legal consequences

These Blackwater guys said that they were given the authority to use lethal force, as well as the power to make arrests. And when asked about this use of them in the United States, they said that they believe that we're going to see a lot more of this and that this is a trend.

Bush's contracts with Blackwater have allowed the creation of a private army of more than 20,000 soldiers, operating with almost no oversight or effective legal constraints, to deploy in nine countries and aggressively expand its presence inside US borders.

These are the same paramilitary private mercenaries that are operating in Iraq. Half of all the armed US men in Iraq are private paramilitary. A 1:1 ratio with soldiers.

Lives are prioritized. Private property is valued more than human lives.

Domestically.

And internationally.

And truth is silenced.

Some soldiers have said enough.

- Lt. Ehren Watada - the first commissioned U.S. officer to refuse to serve in Iraq - Facing court martial, Watada in a 2006 speech to a Veterans for Peace gathering:
- "Normally in our democracy the people speak and act for those in the military. Representatives are elected and officials are appointed to serve on behalf of the people. If the policies of any official are illegal or immoral, it is the obligation of our representatives to correct this misconduct and hold those responsible accountable. This is done to insure the safety and welfare of the American people.
- "Before you nod your head in agreement, consider this: where our elected representatives have failed the people, have not the American people as a whole failed their country, including those in the military - those who have no voice? I am told: those in the military do not have a right to question or dissent. Then who I ask, is speaking for us? Who is acting on our behalf? Some will say because the war persists today, the people will it and it could not be illegal or immoral. Could it be that, the vast majority of the people do not care about the legality or morality of this war nor are they willing to risk much to stop it if it is?

"We in the military are paying a horrible price, and very few of the 300 million people in this country seem to be willing to help us, to scream out, to stop this tragedy this instant."

So, what does it mean to live in country that claims to have a democracy? What responsibilities become ours?

It starts with asking questions.

Did this talk of permanent war begin with 9-11?

Someone said once: *“For the first time in American history, men in authority are talking about an 'emergency' without a foreseeable end. ... The only seriously accepted plan for 'peace' is a fully loaded pistol. In short, war or a high state of war preparedness is felt to be the normal and seemingly permanent condition of the United States.”*

Historian C. Wright Mills in his book ‘The Power Elite’ – back in 1951 – five years before President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned in his farewell address of the ascendancy of the military-industrial complex (a phrase that originally included the word *congressional*)

As if speaking today, Mills said of the power elite, "They have no image of what 'victory' might mean, and they have no idea of any road to victory." He recounted an interview between Gen. James Van Fleet and a reporter over the stalemate produced by the Korean War:

Reporter: *"How may we know, General, when and if we achieve victory?"*

Van Fleet: *"I don't know, except that somebody higher up will have to tell us."*

Did indifference towards public housing and the rights of the poor and disenfranchised begin with the devastation wrought upon thousands in New Orleans?

We were lied to about the reasons behind the US attacks post-9-11. Hell, Osama bin Ladin’s role in the events of September 11, 2001 is not mentioned on the FBI’s “Ten Most Wanted” notice. Six years later the FBI spokesperson explains, “The reason 9/11 is not mentioned on Osama bin Laden's Most Wanted page is because the FBI has no hard evidence connecting bin Laden to 9/11...”

We were lied to as the reasons behind the war in Iraq. We were lied to about the progress in New Orleans.

Truth is revolutionary – that is one reason those in power routinely lie.

Truth is revolutionary. Revolution requires a shift in values. A shift in perspectives. A shift in action. A change in our way in life. That is one reason why too many of us routinely accept the lies.

Forty years ago this year, Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed.

Forty years ago, Dr King said: “I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.”

A radical revolution of values.

Are we willing to revolutionize?

... Some may say that my talk has been rather “political”. To speak is political. To be silent is political.

The ‘darkness that seems so close around us,’ that Dr. King spoke of 40 years ago, has increased its depth. To be silent amidst such horror is to be acquiescent to the policies of the horror. I believe too much in the firm possibility of a new world – one in which our priorities would be life-affirming. Life-affirming.

It is possible.

*[Subeir Hammad]*

Affirm life.

Affirm life.

You are either with life or against it.

Affirm life.