

CXLI – The Manhattan Projection

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By Butler Shaffer

It is interesting to observe the Bush administration's self-righteous posturing over the question of whether Iran is — or should be prevented from — developing a nuclear weapons system. Coming from a country that holds some ten to twelve thousand of such weapons in its quiver, American appeals to the dangers of nuclear proliferation seem hypocritical and self-serving. On the other hand, allowing only the charter members of the nuclear club in on the racket does have the same purpose, at the international level, that gun-control laws serve domestically: to disarm those the empire wishes to control with the threat of superiority in weaponry.

Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. I have no use for military weapons of any sort. They are, by definition, instruments of death used by the state to subdue people and enforce their obedience through violence. Two medieval statues at the entrance to the royal castle in Prague illustrate this most vividly. One shows a brute about to slay his prostrate victim with a sword, while the other depicts a victim about to be done in by a plug-ugly wielding a club. At least there was truth-in-advertising in such statuary! The methods of the state have never changed; there has only been an improvement in the capacity of political systems to inflict massive numbers of deaths upon the innocent.

Bear in mind that this current anti-nuclear crusade is not directed at any of the established nuclear club members. Russia, China, and Pakistan, for instance, are too well endowed with such weaponry for the American government to take its own rhetoric seriously at the expense of these countries. A bully would never be so foolish as to go after anyone of comparable strength. This is why bullies confine their attacks to the likes of Iraq, Libya, Grenada, Kosovo, Lebanon, Somalia, the Sudan, Afghanistan, and other nations too weak to pose a genuine threat. While a few mumblings were directed at North Korea — particularly when it was test-firing missiles — the Bush administration knew better than to talk of u201Cpreemptive strikesu201D against a nuclear-armed dictator.

This moralistic crusade is rendered absurd when one recalls that Bush administration sociopaths have publicly stated either their willingness to employ multiple nuclear strikes upon u201Csuspectedu201D targets, or their refusal to rule out the use of nuclear weapons in the u201Cwar on terror.u201D Is it any wonder, given such pronouncements, that countries considered persona non grata by this administration might want to discourage such attacks by having nuclear weapons of their own with which to threaten retaliation?

Most Americans have a naive opinion of how the rest of the world views their country. This is why so many were easily gullied by Bush administration lies into believing that the Iraqi people would welcome American soldiers as liberators. After all, isn't this view consistent with World War II newsreels showing crowds of French or Italians cheering the arrival of American tanks that replaced Nazi invaders and occupiers?

But the United States no longer basks in the reflected glory of its soldiers unlocking the gates of concentration camps, or handing out chocolate bars to children. Americans are now seen as the invaders and occupiers. The humanitarian image began to tarnish at least as early as the nuclear attacks upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki, atrocities that most of the world now recognize as serving American postwar geopolitical interests, rather than the propagandized purpose of shortening the war. These bombings — along with earlier raids on such non-military targets as Tokyo, Dresden, Würzburg, Hamburg, and other population centers — revealed to the world that not even an American government was immune to the vicious and inhumane virus of state power.

I recall a 1980s-era television talk show featuring Phil Donahue and a Soviet journalist, Vladimir Posner. On one program, a discussion of nuclear weaponry ensued; and Donahue was troubled by the fear, apparently expressed by many Russians, that the United States might use such weapons. But what would make the Russian people think that Americans would do such a thing? Donahue queried. Because you're the only country in history that has done so, replied Posner.

I have long believed that the people who comprise any nation are always more decent and of higher character than those who run their governments. Most Americans probably think of themselves as peaceful, loving individuals who respect other people. It is doubtless this sense that causes those who identify themselves with their nation-state to reject accusations of torture, murder, genocide, and other vile practices committed in their name.

On the other hand, each of us has a dark side to our personality, wherein lie unconscious voices and forces that remind us of the negative qualities that we share with the rest of mankind by virtue of our humanity. Each of us has the capacity for violence, dishonesty, laziness, irresponsibility, and other attributes we are uncomfortable acknowledging, particularly to ourselves. This is not to suggest that we act upon such traits; it is sufficient that we fear that, properly motivated, we might so act.

Many — perhaps most — of us are uncomfortable confronting our dark side and try to rid our sense of self of such qualities by projecting them onto those we have selected as scapegoats for our own felt shortcomings. Wars have been the most vicious and destructive manifestation of our projections. Wanting to extend their own power over other parts of the world, political leaders convince their citizenry that a

competitor state has plans to take over the world and must be militarily opposed. The state must then unleash the dark side forces of its followers with a sufficient ferocity to enlist their participation in its butcherous schemes.

Fear, driven by lies and the fabrication of foreign threats (e.g., the blowing up of the battleship Maine, the sinking of the Lusitania, or the attack on Pearl Harbor), becomes the trigger that allows most of us to lose our individual sense of reason, decency, and responsibility, in a herd-oriented mindset. Like members of a lynch-mob, we are then inclined to strike out at any designated scapegoat whose punishment, we delude ourselves, will relieve the anxiety brought on by this fear not so much of others, as of ourselves.

The war against Iraq could not have been undertaken without the arousal of fears — generated by a consistent pattern of governmental and media lies — that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which they intended for immediate use upon America. Coming on the heels of 9/11, the booboisie fell for this big lie with the same eagerness as earlier generations had in earlier wars.

How does any of this relate to the American government's current campaign against Iran acquiring nuclear weapons? In the case of either Iraq or Iran, why would weapons of mass destruction arouse the fears of Americans? Is it just the destructive capacity of such tools? If this is the explanation, why aren't such fears directed against Great Britain, Israel, France, India, or the United States loosing such destructive power upon the world? The United States has not only used such weapons in the past, but has expressed its willingness to use them in the present. Why is this fact not strong enough to overcome the blatant lies that keep American troops in Iraq, with an American public uncertain as to whether to end the conflagration?

Might psychological projection offer some explanation for this response to alleged Iranian plans to get into the nuclear weapons racket? Other than the faithful viewers of Faux News, perhaps, few will doubt that the invention of nuclear weaponry was a dreadful mistake in human judgment. It was brought on, of course, by a faith in the dualistic nature of political systems: the good guys against the bad guys. Nuclear scientists — operating as the Manhattan Project — failed to see the implications not only of creating weapons capable of destroying all of life on this planet, but of turning them over to political systems whose health, as Randolph Bourne advised, is to be found in the conduct of wars.

Even as the debate over Iranian nuclear research escalates, the American government — with already the second largest stockpile of nuclear weapons — is overseeing a contest between the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and the Los Alamos National Laboratory, to create a new-and-improved nuclear bomb. Such a weapon will then be available for use by a government that has already indicated its willingness to once again employ it against other nations.

Is it unreasonable to suppose that the basis for the u201Cdark sideu201D fears — and, perhaps the guilt — emanating from the monstrously destructive research of the Manhattan Project, and being continued today by the same American state, are being projected onto the likes of Iraq and Iran? Might the baseless fear that u201Ctheyu201D have u201Cweapons of mass destructionu201D operate as a psychological cover for the fact that the United States has been both the creator and exporter of such horrendous weaponry? Are Americans to take comfort in slaughtering the innocent civilians of other countries as a way of relieving themselves of the sense of guilt that their nation — with which they identify — was the one to have created and employed the Frankenstein monster against which they now rail?

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