

We The Good, They The Bad, in CBC's 'war on terrorism' reporting

(Letter to CBC radio "As It Happens")

By Grahame Russell, September 8, 2003

I listen with sadness at your coverage of the global issues of terrorism. As you embark on providing a week of coverage, I suspect the listener will hear more of the same "we versus they", "good versus evil" coverage that we got today.

I am afraid. In the measure that we - in the west - do not open our hearts and the debate to honestly and critically look at the historical and on-going role that the west has played, and continues to play, in issues of global power, terrorism and repression, then we will never come to an understanding of why there is so much "hatred against the west," and a growing number of acts of terrorism and aggression being committed against the west, though for now particularly focused against the U.S.

In the measure that we do not achieve a balanced and nuanced understanding of historical and on-going issues of global power abuse, then the "west" will, in the name of defending "civilization", continue to aggressively use our overwhelming military and economic power (without ever questioning why 'we' have so much wealth and military might) to dominate and crush our perceived enemies, labeling them "terrorists", "evil", "enemies of western civilization", etc.

We will, sadly and logically, create the very "clash of civilizations" that our political leaders and so-called experts say they are working so hard to avoid. They, our so-called enemies, with considerably less wealth and military might, will fight back in any way they can; some of them will turn to terrorism.

The west has dominated and abused 'Iraq' since the imperial powers, Britain and France particularly, carved up the Ottoman Empire and imposed the arbitrary national boundaries that define much of the Middle East today. (There are segments of the Kurd population living and suffering in four countries!) Today, the west ignores or glosses over our history of imperialism, pretending that this history somehow has nothing to do with what is going on today. A majority of the populations of countries in the Middle East know this history of military and economic domination all too well.

More recently, the west -- particularly the US, and also France, Germany, Britain and the former Soviet Union -- supported Saddam Hussein's rise to and consolidation of power in Iraq. He was our ally. We benefited from our economic and military relations with the Iraqi governments, finally dominated by him, from 1963-1990. Notably, he was our ally when he carried out his worst atrocities against the Kurds of Iraq and Iranian people in the 1980s. Now, the west ignores these decades of military, economic and political support, pretending that Hussein is somehow the epitome of evil, a central source of global terrorism.

Most people in the Middle East, whether they like or hate Hussein, know that the west has long used its brute military and economic power to get its way in the region, with no regard for the well-being of the people.

PS - Please do not twist this commentary, in any way, into a defense of repressive, violent regimes in the Middle East, or anywhere else.

PSS - Thank-you for skim-reading and then deleting this short piece. Please prepare CBC reporters to keep traveling to those incomprehensible 'hot-spots' around the globe, to make their careers reporting on the horrible repressions, poverties, wars and sufferings that characterize the lives of so many, that make us so glad to be Canadians, living here in isolated and unaffected bliss on another planet.