The Iraq War: Where is The True Danger?
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We all remember the old joke about the borrowed kettle which Freud quotes in order to render the strange logic of dreams, namely the enumeration of mutually exclusive answers to a reproach (that I returned to a friend a broken kettle): (1) I never borrowed a kettle from you; (2) I returned it to you unbroken; (3) the kettle was already broken when I got it from you. For Freud, such an enumeration of inconsistent arguments of course confirms *per negationem* what it endeavors to deny — that I returned you a broken kettle… Do we not encounter the same inconsistency when high US officials try to justify the attack on Iraq? (1) There is a link between Saddam's regime and al-Qaeda, so Saddam should be punished as part of the revenge for 9/11; (2) even if there was no link between Iraqi regime and al Qaeda, they are united in their hatred of the US — Saddam's regime is a really bad one, a threat not only to the US, but also to its neighbors, and we should liberate the Iraqi people; (3) the change of regime in Iraq will create the conditions for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The problem is that there are TOO MANY reasons for the attack… Furthermore, one is almost tempted to claim that, within the space of this reference to the Freudian logic of dreams, the Iraqi oil supplies function as the famous "umbilical cord" of the US justification(s) — almost tempted, since it would perhaps be more reasonable to claim that there are also three REAL reasons for the attack: (1) the control of the Iraqi oil reserves; (2) the urge to brutally assert and signal the unconditional US hegemony; (3) the "sincere" ideological belief that the US are bringing to other nations democracy and prosperity. And it seems as if these three "real" reasons are the "truth" of the three official reasons: (1) is the truth of the urge to liberate Iraqis; (2) is the truth of the claim the attack on Iraq will help to resolve the Middle East conflict; (3) is the truth of the claim that there is a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda. — And, incidentally, opponents of the war seem to repeat the same inconsistent logic: (1) Saddam is really bad, we also want to see him toppled, but we should give inspectors more time, since inspectors are more efficient; (2) it is all really about the control of oil and American hegemony — the true rogue state which terrorizes others are the US themselves; (3) even if successful, the attack on Iraq will give a big boost to a new wave of the anti-American terrorism; (4) Saddam is a murderer and torturer, his regime a criminal catastrophe, but the attack on Iraq destined to overthrow Saddam will cost too much…

The one good argument for war is the one recently evoked by Christopher Hitchens: one should not forget that the majority of Iraqis effectively are Saddam's victims, and they would be really glad to get rid of them. He was such a catastrophe for his country that an American occupation in WHATEVER form may seem a much brighter prospect to them with regard to daily survival and much lower level of fear. We are not talking here of "bringing Western democracy to Iraq," but just of getting rid of the nightmare called Saddam. To this majority, the caution expressed by Western liberals cannot but appear deeply hypocritical — do they really care about how the Iraqi people feel?

One can make even a more general point here: what about pro-Castro Western Leftists who despise what Cubans themselves call "gusanos /worms/," those who emigrated — but, with all sympathy for the Cuban revolution, what right does a typical middle class Western Leftist have to despise a Cuban who decided to leave Cuba not only because of political disenchantment, but also because of poverty which goes up to simple hunger? In the same vein, I myself remember from the early 1990s dozens of Western Leftists who proudly threw in my face how for them, Yugoslavia still exists, and reproached me for betraying the unique chance of

maintaining Yugoslavia — to which I always answered that I am not yet ready to lead my life so that it will not disappoint Western Leftist dreams… There are effectively few things more worthy of contempt, few attitudes more *ideological* (if this word has any meaning today, it should be applied here) than a tenured Western academic Leftist arrogantly dismissing (or, even worse, "understanding" in a patronizing way) an Eastern European from a Communist country who longs for Western liberal democracy and some consumerist goods… However, it is all too easy to slip from this fact to the notion that "under their skin, Iraqis are also like us, and really want the same as we do." The old story will repeat itself: America brings to the people new hope and democracy, but, instead of hailing the US army, the ungrateful people do want it, they suspect a gift in the gift, and America then reacts as a child with hurt feelings because of the ingratitude of those it selflessly helped.

The underlying presupposition is the old one: under our skin, if we scratch the surface, we are all Americans, that is our true desire — so all that is needed is just to give people a chance, liberate them from their imposed constraints, and they will join us in our ideological dream… No wonder that, in February 2003, an American representative used the word "capitalist revolution" to describe what Americans are now doing: exporting their revolution all around the world. No wonder they moved from "containing" the enemy to a more aggressive stance. It is the US which is now, as the defunct USSR was decades ago, the subversive agent of a world revolution. When Bush recently said "Freedom is not America's gift to other nations, it is god's gift to humanity," this apparent modesty nonetheless, in the best totalitarian fashion, conceals its opposite: yes, BUT it is nonetheless the US which perceives itself as the chosen instrument of distributing this gift to all the nations of the world!

The idea to "repeat Japan in 1945," to bring democracy to Iraq, which will then serve as model for the entire Arab world, enabling people to get rid of the corrupt regimes, immediately faces an insurmountable obstacle: what about Saudi Arabia where it is in the vital US interest that the country does NOT turn into democracy? The result of democracy in Saudi Arabia would have been either the repetition of Iran in 1953 (a populist regime with an anti-imperialist twist) or of Algeria a couple of years ago, when the "fundamentalists" WON the free elections.

There is nonetheless a grain of truth in Rumsfeld's ironic pun against the "old Europe." The French-German united stand against the US policy apropos Iraq should be read against the background of the French-German summit a month ago in which Chirac and Schroeder basically proposed a kind of dual Franco-German hegemony over the European Community. So no wonder that anti-Americanism is at its strongest in "big" European nations, especially France and Germany: it is part of their resistance to globalization. One often hears the complaint that the recent trend of globalization threatens the sovereignty of the Nation-States; here, however, one should qualify this statement: WHICH states are most exposed to this threat? It is not the small states, but the second-rate (ex-)world powers, countries like United Kingdom, Germany and France: what they fear is that, once fully immersed in the newly emerging global Empire, they will be reduced at the same level as, say, Austria, Belgium or even Luxembourg. The refusal of "Americanization" in France, shared by many Leftists and Rightist nationalists, is thus ultimately the refusal to accept the fact that France itself is losing its hegemonic role in Europe. The leveling of weight between larger and smaller Nation-States should thus be counted among the beneficial effects of globalization: beneath the contemptuous deriding of the new Eastern European post-Communist states, it is easy to discern the contours of the wounded Narcissism of the European "great nations." And this great-state-nationalism is not just a feature external to the (failure of) the present opposition; it affects the very way France and Germany articulated this opposition. Instead of doing, even more actively, precisely what Americans are doing — MOBILIZING the "new European" states on their own politico-military platform, ORGANIZING the common new front -, France and Germany arrogantly acted alone.

In the recent French resistance against the war on Iraq, there definitely is a clear echo of the "old decadent" Europe: escape the problem by non-acting, by new resolutions upon resolutions — all this reminiscent of the inactivity of the League of Nations against Germany in the 1930s. And the pacifist call "let the inspectors do their work" clearly IS hypocritical: they are only allowed to do the work because there is a credible threat of military intervention. Not to mention the French neocolonialism in Africa (from Congo-Brazzaville to the dark French role in the Rwanda crisis and massacres)? And about the French role in the Bosnian war? Furthermore, as it was made clear a couple of months ago, is it not clear that France and Germany worry about their own hegemony in Europe?

Is the war on Iraq not the moment of truth when the "official" political distinctions are blurred? Generally, we live in a topsy-turvy world in which Republicans freely spend money, creating record budget deficits, while Democrats practice budget balance; in which Republicans, who thunder against big government and preach devolution of power to states and local communities, are in the process of creating the strongest state mechanism of control in the entire history of humanity. And the same applies to post-Communist countries. Symptomatic is here the case of Poland: the most ardent supporter of the US politics in Poland is the ex-Communist president Kwasniewski (who is even mentioned as the future secretary of NATO, after George Robertson), while the main opposition to the participation of Poland in the anti-Iraq coalition comes from the Rightist parties. Towards the end of January 2003, the Polish bishops also demanded from the government that it should add to the contract which regulates the membership of Poland in the EU a special paragraph guaranteeing that Poland will "retain the right to keep its fundamental values as they are formulated in its constitution" — by which, of course, are meant the prohibition of abortion, of euthanasia and of the same-sex marriages.

The very ex-Communist countries which are the most ardent supporters of the US "war on terror" deeply worry that their cultural identity, their very survival as nations, is threatened by the onslaught of cultural "americanization" as the price for the immersion into global capitalism — we thus witness the paradox of pro-Bushist anti-Americanism. In Slovenia, my own country, there is a similar inconsistency: the Rightist nationalist reproach the ruling Center-Left coalition that, although it is publicly for joining NATO and supporting the US anti-terrorist campaign, it is secretly sabotaging it, participating in it for opportunist reasons, not out of conviction. At the same time, however, it is reproaching the ruling coalition that it wants to undermine Slovene national identity by advocating full Slovene integration into the Westernized global capitalism and thus drowning Slovenes into contemporary Americanized pop-culture. The idea is that the ruling coalition sustains pop culture, stupid TV amusement, mindless consumption, etc., in order to turn Slovenes into an easily manipulated crowd unable of serious reflection and firm ethical posture… In short, the underlying motif is that the ruling coalition stands for the "liberal-Communist plot" : ruthless unconstrained immersion in global capitalism is perceived as the latest dark plot of ex-Communists enabling them to retain their secret hold on power.

The almost tragic misunderstanding is that the nationalists, on the one hand, unconditionally support NATO (under the US command), reproaching the ruling coalition with secretly supporting antiglobalists and anti-American pacifists, while, on the other hand, they worry about the fate of Slovene identity in the process of globalization, claiming that the ruling coalition wants to throw Slovenia into the global whirlpool, not worrying about the Slovene national identity. Ironically, the new emerging socio-ideological order these nationalist conservatives are bemoaning reads like the old New Left description of the "repressive tolerance" and capitalist freedom as the mode of appearance of unfreedom. Here, the example of Italy is crucial, with Berlusconi as prime minister: the staunchest supporter of the US AND the agent of the TV-idiotizing of the public opinion, turning politics into a media show and running a large advertisement and media company.

Where, then, do we stand with reasons pro et contra? Abstract pacifism is intellectually stupid and morally wrong — one has to stand up against a threat. Of course the fall of Saddam would have been a relief to a large majority of the Iraqi people. Even more, of course the militant Islam is a horrifying anti-feminist etc. ideology. Of course there is something of a hypocrisy in all the reasons against: the revolt should come from Iraqi people themselves; we should not impose our values on them; war is never a solution; etc. BUT, although all this is true, the attack is wrong — it is WHO DOES IT that makes it wrong. The reproach is: WHO ARE YOU TO DO THIS? It is not war or peace, it is the correct "gut feeling" that there is something terribly wrong with THIS war, that something will irretrievably change with it.

One of Jacques Lacan's outrageous statements is that, even if what a jealous husband claims about his wife (that she sleeps around with other men) is all true, his jealousy is still pathological; along the same lines, one could say that, even of most of the Nazi claims about the Jews were true (they exploit Germans, they seduce German girls…), their anti-Semitism would still be (and was) pathological — because it represses the true reason WHY the Nazis NEEDED anti-Semitism in order to sustain their ideological position. And the same should be said today, apropos of the US claim "Saddam has weapons of mass destruction!" — even if this claim is true (and it probably is, at least to some degree), it is still false with regard to the position from which it is enunciated.

Everyone fears the catastrophic outcome of the US attack on Iraq: an ecological catastrophe of gigantic proportions, high US casualties, a terrorist attack in the West… In this way, we already accept the US standpoint — and it is easy to imagine how, if the war will be over soon, in a kind of repetition of the 1990 Gulf War, if Saddam's regime will disintegrate fast, there will be a universal sigh of relief even among many present critics of the US policy. One is even tempted to consider the hypothesis that the US are on purpose fomenting this fear of an impending catastrophe, counting on the universal relief when the catastrophe will NOT occur… This, however, is arguably the greatest true danger. That is to say, one should gather the courage to proclaim the opposite: perhaps, the bad military turn for the US would be the best thing that can happen, a sobering piece of bad news which would compel all the participants to rethink their position.

On 9/11 2001, the Twin Towers were hit; twelve years earlier, on 11/9 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. 11/9 announced the "happy 90s," the Francis Fukuyama dream of the "end of history," the belief that liberal democracy has in principle won, that the search is over, that the advent of a global liberal world community lurks round the corner, that the obstacles to this ultra-Hollywood happy ending are just empirical and contingent, local pockets of resistance where the leaders did not yet grasp that their time is over; in contrast to it, 9/11 is the main symbol of the end of the Clintonite happy 90s, of the forthcoming era in which new walls are emerging everywhere, between Israel and the West Bank, around the European Union, on the US-Mexican border. The prospect of a new global crisis is looming: economic collapses, military and other catastrophes, emergency states…

And when politicians start to directly justify their decisions in ethical terms, one can be sure that ethics is mobilized to cover up such dark threatening horizons. It is the very inflation of abstract ethical rhetorics in George W. Bush's recent public statements (of the "Does the world have the courage to act against the Evil or not?" type) which manifests the utter ETHICAL misery of the US position — the function of ethical reference is here purely mystifying, it merely serves to mask the true political stakes, which are not difficult to discern. In their recent *The War Over Iraq*, William Kristol and Lawrence F. Kaplan wrote: "The mission begins in Baghdad, but it does not end there. /…/ We stand at the cusp of a new historical era. /…/ This is a decisive moment. /…/ It is so clearly about more than Iraq. It is about more even than the future of the Middle East and the war on terror. It is about what sort of role the United States intends to play in the twenty-first century." One cannot but agree with it: it is effectively the future of international community which is at stake now — the new

rules which will regulate it, what the new world order will be. What is going on now is the next logical step of the US dismissal of the Hague court.

The first permanent global war crimes court started to work on July 1, 2002 in The Hague, with the power to tackle genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Anyone, from a head of state to an ordinary citizen, will be liable to ICC prosecution for human rights violations, including systematic murder, torture, rape and sexual slavery, or, as Kofi Annan put it: "There must be a recognition that we are all members of one human family. We have to create new institutions. This is one of them. This is another step forward in humanity's slow march toward civilization." However, while human rights groups have hailed the court's creation as the biggest milestone for international justice since top Nazis were tried by an international military tribunal in Nuremberg after World War Two, the court faces stiff opposition from the United States, Russia and China. The United States says the court would infringe on national sovereignty and could lead to politically motivated prosecutions of its officials or soldiers working outside U.S. borders, and the U.S. Congress is even weighing legislation authorizing U.S. forces to invade The Hague where the court will be based, in the event prosecutors grab a U.S. national. The noteworthy paradox here is that the US thus rejected the jurisdiction of a tribunal which was constituted with the full support (and votes) of the US themselves! Why, then, should Milosevic, who now sits in the Hague, not be given the right to claim that, since the US reject the legality of the international jurisdiction of the Hague tribunal, the same argumentation should hold also for him? And the same goes for Croatia: the US are now exerting tremendous pressure onto the Croat government to deliver to the Hague court a couple of its generals accused of war crimes during the struggles in Bosnia — the reaction is, of course, how can they ask this of US when THEY do not recognize the legitimacy of the Hague court? Or are the US citizens effectively "more equal than others"? If one simply universalizes the underlying principles of the Bush-doctrine, does India not have a full right to attack Pakistan? It does directly support and harbor anti-Indian terror in Kashmir, and it possesses (nuclear) weapons of mass destruction. Not to mention the right of China to attack Taiwan, and so on, with unpredictable consequences…

Are we aware that we are in the midst of a "silent revolution," in the course of which the unwritten rules which determine the most elementary international logic are changing? The US scold Gerhardt Schroeder, a democratically elected leader, for maintaining a stance supported by a large majority of the population, plus, according to the polls in the mid-February, around 59% of the US population itself (who oppose strike against Iraq without the UN support). In Turkey, according to opinion polls, 94% of the people are opposed to allowing the US troops' presence for the war against Iraq — where is democracy here? Every old Leftist remembers Marx's reply, in *The Communist Manifesto*, to the critics who reproached the Communists that they aim at undermining family, property, etc.: it is the capitalist order itself whose economic dynamics is destroying the traditional family order (incidentally, a fact more true today than in Marx's time), as well as expropriating the large majority of the population. In the same vein, is it not that precisely those who pose today as global defenders of democracy are effectively undermining it? In a perverse rhetorical twist, when the pro-war leaders are confronted with the brutal fact that their politics is out of tune with the majority of their population, they take recourse to the commonplace wisdom that "a true leader leads, he does not follow" — and this from leaders otherwise obsessed with opinion polls…

The true dangers are the long-term ones. In what resides perhaps the greatest danger of the prospect of the American occupation of Iraq? The present regime in Iraq is ultimately a secular nationalist one, out of touch with the Muslim fundamentalist populism — it is obvious that Saddam only superficially flirts with the pan-Arab Muslim sentiment. As his past clearly demonstrates, he is a pragmatic ruler striving for power, and shifting alliances when it fits his purposes — first against Iran to grab their oil fields, then against Kuwait for the same reason, bringing against himself a pan-Arab coalition allied to the US — what Saddam is not is a fundamentalist obsessed with the "big Satan," ready to blow the world apart just to get him. However, what can

emerge as the result of the US occupation is precisely a truly fundamentalist Muslim anti-American movement, directly linked to such movements in other Arab countries or countries with Muslim presence.

One can surmise that the US are well aware that the era of Saddam and his non-fundamentalist regime is coming to an end in Iraq, and that the attack on Iraq is probably conceived as a much more radical preemptive strike — not against Saddam, but against the main contender for Saddam's political successor, a truly fundamentalist Islamic regime. Yes in this way, the vicious cycle of the American intervention gets only more complex: the danger is that the very American intervention will contribute to the emergence of what America most fears, a large united anti-American Muslim front. It is the first case of the direct American occupation of a large and key Arab country — how could this not generate universal hatred in reaction? One can already imagine thousands of young people dreaming of becoming suicide bombers, and how that will force the US government to impose a permanent high alert emergency state… However, at this point, one cannot resist a slightly paranoid temptation: what if the people around Bush KNOW this, what if this "collateral damage" is the true aim of the entire operation? What if the TRUE target of the "war on terror" is the American society itself, i.e., the disciplining of its emancipatory excesses?

On March 5 2003, on "Buchanan & Press" news show on NBC, they showed on the TV screen the photo of the recently captured Khalid Shakh Mohammed, the "third man of al-Qaeda" — a mean face with moustaches, in an unspecified nightgown prison-dress, half opened and with something like bruises half-discernible (hints that he was already tortured?) -, while Pat Buchanan's fast voice was asking: "Should this man who knows all the names all the detailed plans for the future terrorist attacks on the US, be tortured, so that we get all this out of him?" The horror of it was that the photo, with its details, already suggested the answer — no wonder the response of other commentators and viewers' calls was an overwhelming "Yes!" — which makes one nostalgic of the good old days of the colonial war in Algeria when the torture practiced by the French Army was a dirty secret… Effectively, was this not a pretty close realization of what Orwell imagined in 1984, in his vision of "hate sessions," where the citizens are shown photos of the traitors and supposed to boo and yell at them. And the story goes on: a day later, on another Fox TV show, a commentator claimed that one is allowed to do with this prisoner whatever, not only deprive him of sleep, but break his fingers, etc.etc., because he is "a piece of human garbage with no rights whatsoever." THIS is the true catastrophe: that such public statements are today possible.

We should therefore be very attentive not to fight false battles: the debates on how bad Saddam is, even on how much the war will cost, etc., are false debates. The focus should be on what effectively goes on in our societies, on what kind of society is emerging HERE as the result of the "war on terror." Instead of talking about hidden conspirative agendas, one should shift the focus onto what is going on, onto what kind of changes are taking place here and now. The ultimate result of the war will be a change in OUR political order.

The true danger can be best exemplified by the actual role of the populist Right in Europe: to introduce certain topics (the foreign threat, the necessity to limit immigration, etc.) which were then silently taken over not only by the conservative parties, but even by the de facto politics of the "Socialist" governments. Today, the need to "regulate" the status of immigrants, etc., is part of the mainstream consensus: as the story goes, le Pen did address and exploit real problems which bother people. One is almost tempted to say that, if there were no le Pen in France, he should have been invented: he is a perfect person whom one loves to hate, the hatred for whom guarantees the wide liberal "democratic pact," the pathetic identification with democratic values of tolerance and respect for diversity — however, after shouting "Horrible! How dark and uncivilized! Wholly unacceptable! A threat to our basic democratic values!", the outraged liberals proceed to act like "le Pen with a human face," to do the same thing in a more "civilized" way, along the lines of "But the racist populists are manipulating legitimate worries of ordinary people, so we do have to take some measures!"…

We do have here a kind of perverted Hegelian "negation of negation": in a first negation, the populist Right disturbs the aseptic liberal consensus by giving voice to passionate dissent, clearly arguing against the "foreign threat"; in a second negation, the "decent" democratic center, in the very gesture of pathetically rejecting this populist Right, integrates its message in a "civilized" way — in-between, the ENTIRE FIELD of background "unwritten rules" has already changed so much that no one even notices it and everyone is just relieved that the anti-democratic threat is over. And the true danger is that something similar will happen with the "war on terror": "extremists" like John Ashcroft will be discarded, but their legacy will remain, imperceptibly interwoven into the invisible ethical fabric of our societies. Their defeat will be their ultimate triumph: they will no longer be needed, since their message will be incorporated into the mainstream.

From: Lacan.com 03.13.2003.
Available: http://www.lacan.com/iraq.htm.