

9/11, Spectacles of Terror, and Media Manipulation: A Critique of Jihadist and Bush Media Politics

Douglas Kellner

(<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>)

Abstract. The September 11 attacks on the U.S. dramatized the relationship between media spectacles of terror and the strategy of Islamic Jihadism that employs spectacular media events to promote its agenda. But U.S. administrations have also used spectacles of terror to promote U.S. military power and geopolitical ends, as is evident in the Gulf war of 1990-1991, the Afghanistan war of fall 2001, and the Iraq war of 2003. In this paper I argue that both Islamic Jihadists and two Bush administrations have deployed spectacles of terror to promote their political agendas; that both deploy Manichean discourses of good and evil which themselves fit into dominant media codes of popular culture; and that both deploy fundamentalist and absolutist discourses. Criticizing the role of the U.S. broadcasting media in presenting the September 11 terror spectacle and subsequent Bush Terror War, I argue against both Islamic terrorism and U.S. militarism, and call for multilateral and global responses to terrorism and rogue regimes. I also argue that the Internet is the best source of information concerning complex events like Terror War, while mainstream U.S. corporate media, especially broadcasting, have become instruments of propaganda for the Bush administration and Pentagon during spectacles of terrorism and war. Finally, I suggest limitations of the politics of the spectacle and argue that the record of the spectacles of Terror War in recent years disclose highly ambiguous, unpredictable, and negative political effects.

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and on the Pentagon near Washington, D.C. were shocking global media events that dominated public attention and provoked reams of discourse, reflection, and writing. These media spectacles were intended to terrorize the U.S., to attack symbolic targets, and to unfold a terror spectacle Jihad against the West, as well as to undermine the U.S. and global economy. The World Trade Center is an apt symbol of global capitalism in the heart of the New York financial district, while the Pentagon stands as an icon and center of U.S. military power. In this study, I suggest how Osama bin Laden and various groups denominated al Qaeda have used spectacles of terror to promote their agenda in a media-saturated era and how two Bush administrations have also deployed terror spectacle to promote their geo-political ends.¹

Terror Spectacle

The term “terrorism” is one of the most overloaded and contested terms in contemporary political vocabulary.² First used to describe the “reign of terror” following the radical phase of the French Revolution, the term was used in the 19th century to

describe the violent activities of Russian revolutionaries. By the late 1960s, the Nixon administration was using the term “terrorism” to describe a wide range of activities and groups. It established a Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism in 1972 and subsequent US administrations continued to develop agencies and task forces to fight “terrorism,” which became a widespread designation to label groups that the US government or their allies were fighting. But during this era, the US was also widely accused of crimes against civilians in Vietnam and elsewhere, as well as using violence to intervene in other countries politics, so the term “state terrorism” began to emerge, a term also frequently applied to Israel (see Herman 1998).

Hence, “terrorism” was highly constructed and contested with one group’s “terrorists” another group’s “freedom fighters.” Varied political groups labeled “terrorists” have long constructed media spectacles of terror to promote their causes, attack their adversaries, and gain worldwide publicity and attention. There had been many major terror spectacles before, both in the U.S. and elsewhere. Hijacking of airplanes had been a standard form constructing spectacles of terror, but the ante was significantly upped when in 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, hijacked three Western jetliners. The group forced the planes to land in the Jordanian desert, and then blew up the planes in an incident known as “Black September” which was the topic of a Hollywood film. In 1972, Palestinian gunmen from the same movement stunned the world when they took Israeli athletes hostage at the Munich Olympic Games, producing another media spectacle turned into an academy award winning documentary film.

In 1975, an OPEC (Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries) meeting was disrupted in Vienna, Austria when a terrorist group led by the notorious Carlos the Jackal entered, killing three people and wounding several in a chaotic shootout. Americans were targeted in a 1983 terror campaign in Beirut Lebanon, in which 243 U.S. servicemen were killed, orchestrated by a Shiite Muslim suicide bomber, that led the U.S. to withdraw its troops from Lebanon. U.S. tourists were victims in 1985 of Palestinians who seized the cruise ship Achilles Lauro, when Leon Klinghoffer, 69, a crippled Jewish American, was killed and his body and wheelchair were thrown overboard.

In 1993, the World Trade Center was assaulted in New York by Islamist radicals linked to Osama bin Laden, providing a preview of the more spectacular September 11 attack. An American born terrorist, Timothy McVeigh, bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 and wounding more than 500. And the bin Laden group had assaulted U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998 and a U.S. destroyer harbored in Yemen in 2000. Consequently, terror spectacle is a crucial part of the deadly game of contemporary politics and the bin Laden group had systematically used spectacle of terror to promote its agenda. But the 9/11 terror spectacle was the most extravagant strike on U.S. targets in its history and the first foreign attack on the continental U.S. since the war of 1812.

In a global media world, extravagant terror spectacles have been orchestrated in part to gain worldwide attention, dramatize the issues of the groups involved, and achieve specific political objectives. Previous Al Qaeda strikes against the U.S. hit a range of targets to try to demonstrate that the U.S. was weak and vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The earlier 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New York, the embassy assaults in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the strike on the USS Cole in 2000 combined surprise with detailed planning and coordination in well-orchestrated, high concept terror spectacle.³

Spectacle of terror thus use dramatic images and montage to catch attention, hoping thereby to catalyze unanticipated events that will spread further terror through domestic populations. The September 11 terror spectacle looked like a disaster film, leading Hollywood director Robert Altman to chide his industry for producing extravaganzas of terror that could serve as models for spectacular terror campaigns. Was Independence Day (1996) the template for 9/11 in which Los Angeles and New York were attacked by aliens and the White House was destroyed? The collapse of the WTC indeed had resonances of The Towering Inferno (1975) that depicted a high-rise building catching on fire, burning and collapsing, or even Earthquake (1975) that depicted the collapse of entire urban environments. For these two Hollywood disaster films, however, the calamity emerged from within the system, in the case of the first, and from nature itself in the second. In the September 11 terror spectacle, by contrast, the villains were foreign terrorists obviously committed to wreaking maximum destruction on the U.S. and it was not certain how the drama would end or if order would be restored in a “happy ending.”

The novelty of the September 11 terror spectacle resulted from the combination of airplane hijacking and the use of airplanes to crash into buildings and destabilize urban and economic life. The targets were symbolic, representing global capital and American military power, yet had material effects, disrupting the airline industry, the businesses centered in downtown New York, and the global economy itself through the closure of the U.S. and other stock markets and subsequent downturns of the world’s markets. Indeed, as a response to the drama of the terror spectacle, an unparalleled shutdown occurred in New York, Washington, and other major cities throughout the U.S., with government and businesses closing up for the day and the airline system canceling all flights. Wall Street and the stock market were shut down for days, baseball and entertainment events were postponed, Disneyland and Disneyworld were closed, McDonald’s locked up its regional offices, and most major U.S. cities became eerily quiet.

Post 9/11 Media Spectacle

The 9/11 terror spectacle unfolded in a city that was one of the most media-saturated in the world and that played out a deadly drama live on television. The images of the planes hitting the World Trade Center towers and their collapse were broadcast

repeatedly, as if repetition were necessary to master a highly traumatic event. The spectacle conveyed the message that the U.S. was vulnerable to terror attack, that terrorists could create great harm, and that anyone at anytime could be subject to a violent terror attack, even in Fortress America. The suffering, fear, and death that many people endure on a daily basis in violent and insecure situations in other parts of the world, was brought home to U.S. citizens. Suddenly, the vulnerability and anxiety suffered by many people throughout the world was also deeply experienced by U.S. citizens, in some cases for the first time. The terror attacks thus had material effects, attempting to harm the U.S. and global economy, and psychic effects, traumatizing a nation with fear. The spectacle of terror was broadcast throughout the global village, with the whole world watching the assault on the U.S. and New York's attempts to cope with the attacks.⁴

The live television broadcasting brought a “you are there” drama to the September 11 spectacle. The images of the planes striking the World Trade Center, the buildings bursting into flames, individuals jumping out of the window in a desperate attempt to survive the inferno, and the collapse of the Towers and subsequent chaos provided unforgettable images that viewers would not soon forget. The drama continued throughout the day with survivors being pulled from the rubble, and the poignant search for individuals still alive and attempts to deal with the attack produced resonant iconic images seared deeply into spectators' memories. Many people who witnessed the event suffered nightmares and psychological trauma. For those who viewed it intensely, the spectacle provided a powerful set of images that would continue to resonate for years to come, much as the footage of the Kennedy assassination, iconic photographs of Vietnam, the 1986 explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, or the death of Princess Diana in the 1990s provided unforgettable imagery.

The September 11 terror attacks in New York were claimed to be “the most documented event in history” in a May 2002 HBO film In Memoriam which itself provided a collage of images assembled from professional news crews, documentary filmmakers, and amateur videographers and photographers who in some cases risked their lives to document the event. As with other major media spectacles, the September 11 terror spectacle took over TV programming for the next three days without commercial break as the major television networks focused on the attack and its aftermath.⁵

There followed a media spectacle of the highest order. For several days, US television suspended broadcasting of advertising and TV entertainment and focused solely on the momentous events of September 11. In the following analysis, I want to suggest how the images and discourses of the US television networks framed the 9/11 attacks to whip up war hysteria, while failing to provide a coherent account of what happened, why it happened, and what would count as responsible responses. In an analysis of the dominant discourses, frames, and representations that informed the media and public debate in the days following the September 11 attacks, I will show how the mainstream media in the United States privileged the “clash of civilizations” model, established a

binary dualism between Islamic terrorism and civilization, and largely circulated war fever and retaliatory feelings and discourses that called for and supported a form of military intervention. I argue that such one-dimensional militarism could arguably make the current crisis worse, rather than providing solutions to the problem of global terrorism. Thus, while the media in a democracy should critically debate urgent questions facing the nation, in the terror crisis the mainstream U.S. corporate media, especially television, promoted war fever and military solutions to the problem of global terrorism.

On the day of the strikes on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the networks brought out an array of national security state intellectuals, usually ranging from the right to the far right, to explain the horrific events of September 11. The Fox Network presented former UN Ambassador and Reagan Administration apologist Jeane Kirkpatrick, who rolled out a simplified version of Huntington's clash of civilizations (1996), arguing that we were at war with Islam and should defend the West.⁶ Kirkpatrick was the most discredited intellectual of her generation, legitimating Reagan administration alliances with unsavory fascists and terrorists as necessary to beat Soviet totalitarianism. Her 1980s propaganda line was premised on a distinction between fascism and communist totalitarianism which argued that alliances with authoritarian or rightwing terrorist organizations or states were defensible since these regimes were open to reform efforts or historically undermined themselves and disappeared. Soviet totalitarianism, by contrast, should be resolutely opposed since a communist regime had never collapsed or been overthrown and communism was an intractable and dangerous foe, which must be fought to the death with any means necessary. Of course, the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s, along with its Empire, and although Kirkpatrick was totally discredited she was awarded a Professorship at Georgetown and continued to circulate her crackpot views through Fox TV and other rightwing venues.

On the afternoon of September 11, Ariel Sharon, leader of Israel, himself implicated in war crimes in Saba and Shatila in Lebanon in 1982, came on television to convey his regret, condolences, and assurance of Israel's support in the war on terror. Sharon called for a coalition against terrorist networks, which would contrast the civilized world with terrorism, representing the Good vs. Evil, "humanity" vs. "the blood-thirsty," "the free world" against "the forces of darkness," which are trying to destroy "freedom" and our "way of life."

Curiously, the Bush Administration would take up the same tropes with Bush attacking the "evil" of the terrorists, using the word five times in his first statement on the September 11 terror assaults, and repeatedly portraying the conflict as a war between good and evil in which the U.S. was going to "eradicate evil from the world," "to smoke out and pursue... evil doers, those barbaric people." The semantically insensitive and dyslexic Bush administration also used cowboy metaphors, calling for bin Laden "dead or alive," and described the campaign as a "crusade," until he was advised that this term carried offensive historical baggage of earlier wars of Christians and Moslems. And the

Pentagon at first named the war against terror “Operation Infinite Justice,” until they were advised that only God could dispense “infinite justice,” and that Americans and others might be troubled about a war expanding to infinity.

Disturbingly, in outlining the goals of the war, Bush never mentioned “democracy,” and the new name for the “war on terrorism” became “Operation Enduring Freedom.” The Bush Administration mantra repeated constantly that the war against terrorism was being fought for “freedom.” But the history of political theory suggests that freedom must be paired with equality, or concepts like justice, rights, or democracy, to provide adequate political theory and legitimation for political action. It is precisely the contempt for democracy and national self-determination that has characterized U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East for the past decades, which is a prime reason why groups and individuals in the area passionately hate the United States.

In a discourse-historical analysis of “calls to arms” speeches that compare orations by Bush after September 11 with Pope Urban II, Queen Elizabeth I, and Adolf Hitler, the authors identify generic features in such speeches which include an appeal to a legitimate power source external to the speaker; an appeal to the importance of the national culture under attack; the construction of an evil enemy; and an appeal for unification (Graham, Keenan, Dowd forthcoming). Illustrating Bush’s appeal to support his war on terror, the authors cite a speech the president made five days after the 9/11 attacks:

We're a great nation. We're a nation of resolve. We're a nation that can't be cowed by evil-doers. I've got great faith in the American people. If the American people had seen what I had seen in New York City, you'd have great faith, too. You'd have faith in the hard work of the rescuers; you'd have great faith because of the desire for people to do what's right for America; you'd have great faith because of the compassion and love that our fellow Americans are showing each other in times of need.

Graham, Keenan, Dowd note how Bush merges the “great nation,” “resolve,” faith, justice and love in his talk to appeal to common values and to unite the nation. His use of “We,” “I,” and “you” serve as rhetorical devices to bind himself with the country. It should also be noted that Bush points to the sight of the September 11 destruction in making his case (“If the American people had seen what I had seen in New York City”). Indeed, the images of the destruction of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were an iconic part of the mediascape at the time that Bush and his administration constantly referred to (and continue to do so as he gears up for re-election).

Bush also notoriously uses Manichean discourse to construct the “evil Other” who attacked the US and to highlight the goodness of the US against the evil of terrorism, using completely binary discourse. In his speech to Congress on September 20 declaring

his war against terrorism, Bush described the conflict as a war between freedom and fear, between “those governed by fear” who “want to destroy our wealth and freedoms,” and those on the side of freedom. Up to the present, Bush continued to use the word “freedom” to describe both what he was fighting for and what the terrorists were opposing. Yet “freedom” for Bush has usually signaled the capacity to say and do anything he wanted to, in a lifetime of providing deregulation of the economy, favors to his corporate supporters, and participation himself in dubious political and economic activities. The “Bush doctrine” in foreign policy has signified freedom for the U.S. to wage preemptive strikes anywhere it wishes at any time, and the unilateralist Bush administration foreign policy has signified freedom from major global treaties ranging from Kyoto to every conceivable international effort to regulate arms and military activity (see Kellner 2001 and 2003).

And while Bush ascribed “fear” to its symbolic Other and enemy, as Michael Moore’s 2001 film Bowling for Columbine demonstrates, the U.S. corporate media have been exploiting fear for decades in their excessive presentation of murder and violence and dramatization of a wide range of threats from foreign enemies and within everyday life. Clearly, the media and the Bush administration whipped up fear and panic in their post-9/11 coverage of anthrax attacks and frequent reports of terrorist threats. Moreover, since the September 11 strikes, the Bush administration has arguably used fear tactics to advance its political agenda, including tax breaks for the rich, curtailment of social programs, military build-up, the most draconian assaults on U.S. rights and freedoms in the contemporary era in the so-called USA Patriot Act, and a highly controversial and divisive March 2003 war on Iraq.

In his September 20 talk to Congress, Bush drew a line between those who supported terrorism and those who were ready to fight it. Stating, “you’re either with us, or against us,” Bush declared war on any states supporting terrorism and laid down a series of non-negotiable demands to the Taliban who ruled Afghanistan, while Congress wildly applauded. Bush’s popularity soared with a country craving blood-revenge and the head of Osama bin Laden. Moreover, Bush also asserted that his administration held accountable those nations who supported terrorism — a position that could nurture and legitimate military interventions for years to come.

Interestingly, Bush Administration discourses, like those of bin Laden and radical Islamists, are fundamentally Manichean, positing a binary opposition between Good and Evil, Us and Them, civilization and barbarism. Bush’s Manichean dualism replicates as well the Friend/Enemy opposition of Carl Schmidt upon which Nazi politics were based. Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and “the Terrorist” provided the face of an enemy to replace the “evil Empire” of Soviet Communism, which was the face of the Other in the Cold War. The terrorist Other, however, does not reside in a specific country with particular military targets and forces, but is part of an invisible empire supported by a multiplicity of groups and states. This amorphous terrorist Enemy, then, allows the crusader for

Good to attack any country or group that is supporting terrorism, thus promoting a foundation for a new doctrine of preemptive strikes and perennial war.

The discourse of Good and Evil can be appropriated by disparate and opposing groups and generates a highly dichotomous opposition, undermining democratic communication and consensus, and provoking violent militaristic responses. It is assumed by both sides that “we” are the good, and the “Other” is wicked, an assertion that Bush made in his incessant assurance that the “evil-doers” of the “evil deeds” will be punished, and that the “Evil One,” will be brought to justice, implicitly equating bin Laden with Satan himself.

Such hyperbolic rhetoric is a salient example of *Bushspeak* that communicates through codes to specific audiences, in this case domestic Christian rightwing groups that are Bush’s preferred recipients of his discourse.⁷ But demonizing terms for bin Laden both elevate his status in the Arab world as a superhero who stands up to the West, and angers those who feel such discourse is insulting. Moreover, the trouble with the discourse of “evil” is that it is totalizing and absolutistic, allowing no ambiguities or contradictions. It assumes a binary logic where “we” are the forces of goodness and “they” are the forces of darkness. Such discourse legitimates any action undertaken in the name of good, no matter how destructive, on the grounds that it is attacking evil. The discourse of evil is also cosmological and apocalyptic, evoking a cataclysmic war with cosmic stakes. On this perspective, Evil cannot be just attacked one piece at a time, through incremental steps, but it must be totally defeated, eradicated from the earth if Good is to reign. This discourse of evil raises the stakes and violence of conflict and nurtures more apocalyptic and catastrophic politics, fuelling future cycles of hatred, violence, and wars.

Furthermore, the *Bushspeak* dualisms between fear and freedom, barbarism and civilization, and the like can hardly be sustained in empirical and theoretical analysis of the contemporary moment. In fact, there is much fear and poverty in “our” world and wealth, and freedom and security in the Arab and Islamic worlds — at least for privileged elites. No doubt, freedom, fear, and wealth are distributed in both worlds so to polarize these categories and to make them the legitimating principles of war is highly irresponsible. And associating oneself with “good,” while making one’s enemy “evil,” is another exercise in binary reductionism and projection of all traits of aggression and wickedness onto the “other” while constituting oneself as good and pure.

It is, of course, theocratic Islamic fundamentalists who themselves engage in similar simplistic binary discourse and projection of evil onto the other which they use to legitimate acts of terrorism. For certain Manichean Islamic fundamentalists, the U.S. is “Evil,” the source of all the world’s problems and deserves to be destroyed. Such one-dimensional thought does not distinguish between U.S. policies, leaders, institutions, or people, while advocating a Jihad, or holy war against the American monolithic evil. The

terrorist crimes of September 11 appeared to be part of this Jihad and the monstrosity of the actions of killing innocent civilians shows the horrific consequences of totally dehumanizing an “enemy” deemed so evil that even innocent members of the group in question deserve to be exterminated.

Many commentators on U.S. television offered similarly one-sided and Manichean accounts of the cause of the September 11 events, blaming their favorite opponents in the current U.S. political spectrum as the source of the terror assaults. For fundamentalist Christian ideologue Jerry Falwell, and with the verbal agreement of Christian Broadcast Network President Pat Robertson, the culpability for this "horror beyond words" fell on liberals, feminists, gays and the ACLU. Jerry Falwell said and Pat Robertson agreed: "The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way--all of them who have tried to secularize America--I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'" In fact, this argument is similar to a rightwing Islamic claim that the U.S. is fundamentally corrupt and evil and thus deserves God's wrath, an argument made by Falwell critics that forced the fundamentalist fanatic to apologize.

For rightwingers, like Gary Aldrich, the “President and Founder” of the Patrick Henry Center, it was the liberals who were at fault: "Excuse me if I absent myself from the national political group-hug that's going on. You see, I believe the Liberals are largely responsible for much of what happened Tuesday, and may God forgive them. These people exist in a world that lies beyond the normal standards of decency and civility." Other rightists, like Rush Limbaugh, argued incessantly that it was all Bill Clinton's fault, and Election-thief manager James Baker (see Kellner 2001) blamed the catastrophe on the 1976 Church report that put limits on the CIA.

On the issue of “what to do,” rightwing columnist Ann Coulter declaimed: "We know who the homicidal maniacs are. They are the ones cheering and dancing right now. We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity."⁸ While Bush was declaring a “crusade” against terrorism and the Pentagon was organizing “Operation Infinite Justice,” Bush Administration Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said the administration's retaliation would be "sustained and broad and effective" and that the United States "will use all our resources. It's not just simply a matter of capturing people and holding them accountable, but removing the sanctuaries, removing the support systems, ending states who sponsor terrorism."

Such all-out war hysteria and militarism was the order of the day, and throughout September 11 and its aftermath ideological warhorses like William Bennett came out and urged that the U.S. declare war on Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, and whoever else harbored terrorists. On the Canadian Broadcasting Network, former Reagan administration, Deputy

Secretary of Defense and military commentator Frank Gaffney suggested that the U.S. needed to go after the sponsors of these states as well, such as China and Russia, to the astonishment and derision of the Canadian audience. And rightwing talk radio and the Internet buzzed with talk of dropping nuclear bombs on Afghanistan, exterminating all Moslems, and whatever other fantasy popped into their unhinged heads.

Hence, broadcast television allowed dangerous and extremist zealots to vent and circulate the most aggressive, fanatic, and sometimes lunatic views, creating a consensus around the need for immediate military action and all-out war. The television networks themselves featured logos such as “War on America,” “America’s New War,” and other inflammatory slogans that assumed that the U.S. was at war and that only a military response was appropriate. Few cooler heads appeared on any of the major television networks that repeatedly beat the war drums day after day, without even the relief of commercials for three days straight, driving the country into hysteria and making it certain that there would be a military response and war.

Radio was even more frightening. Not surprisingly, talk radio oozed hatred and hysteria, calling for violence against Arabs and Muslims, nuclear retaliation, and global war. As the days went by, even mainstream radio news became hyperdramatic, replete with music, patriotic gore, and wall-to-wall terror hysteria and war propaganda. National Public Radio, Pacifica, and some programs attempted rational discussion and debate, but on the whole talk radio was all propaganda, all the time.

There is no question concerning the depth of emotion and horror with which the U.S. experienced the first serious assault on the continent by its enemies. The constant invocation of analogies to “Pearl Harbor” inevitably elicited a need to strike back and prepare for war. The strike on the World Trade Center and New York City evoked images of assault on the very body of the country, while the attack on the Pentagon represented a strike on the country’s defense system, showing the vulnerability, previously unperceived, of the U.S. to deadly acts of violence and terrorism.

The network anchors as well as political commentators framed the event as a military attack, with Peter Jennings of ABC stating, “The response is going to have to be massive if it is to be effective.” For some years, a growing number of “expert consultants” were hired by the television corporations to explain complex events to the public. The military consultants hired by the networks had close connections to the Pentagon and usually would express the Pentagon point of view and spin of the day, making them more propaganda conduits for the military than independent analysts. Commentators and Congressman, like John McCain (R-Arz.), Henry Kissinger, James Baker, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and other long-time advocates of the military-industrial complex, described the attacks as an “act of war” immediately on September 11 and the days following. For hawkish pundits, the terror attacks required an immediate military response and dramatic expansion of the U.S. military. Many of these hawks were former government officials,

like Kissinger and Baker, who were currently tied into the defense industries, guaranteeing that their punditry would be paid for by large profits of the defense industries that they were part of. Indeed, the Bush family, James Baker and other advocates of large-scale military retribution were connected with the Carlyle Fund, the largest investor in military industries in the world. Dick Cheney's former Halliburton Corporation would benefit from military and reconstruction contracts, as would the Bechtel Corporation that Donald Rumsfeld and other major figures in the Republican Party and prowar community were connected with.⁹

Consequently, these advocates of war would profit immensely from sustained military activity, an embarrassment rarely mentioned on television or the mainstream press, but that was widely discussed in alternative media and the Internet. While many critics cautioned against calling the terror attacks "war" and called for multilateral legal, police, and military coalitions to go after the Al Qaeda network, rather than a primarily unilateral U.S. military assault, such debates did not take place in the U.S. broadcasting media.¹⁰ Instead of reasoned debate, the TV networks helped generate and sustain widespread public desire for military intervention. After September 11, the networks played show after show detailing the harm done to victims of the bombing, kept their cameras aimed at "Ground Zero" to document the destruction and drama of discovery of dead bodies, and constructed report after report on the evil of bin Laden and the Al Qaeda terrorists who had committed the atrocities.

The lack of debate in the U.S. corporate broadcasting media points to an intensifying crisis of democracy in the United States.¹¹ While the media are supposed to discuss issues of public importance and present a wide range of views, during the epoch of Terror War they have largely privileged Bush administration and Pentagon positions. Part of the problem is that the Democratic Party did not vigorously contest Bush's positions on terrorism and voted overwhelmingly for his authority to take whatever steps necessary to attack terrorists, as well as supporting the so-called USA Patriot Act, that greatly curtailed civil liberties and his 2003 war against Iraq. Most of the rest of the world, and significant sectors within U.S. society, invisible on television, however, opposed Bush administration policy and called for more multilateral approaches to problems like terrorism.

From September 11 to the beginning of the U.S. bombing acts on Afghanistan in October, the U.S. corporate media intensified war fever and there was an orgy of patriotism such as the country had not seen since World War II. Media frames shifted from "America Under Attack" to "America Strikes Back" and "America's New War" -- even before any military action was undertaken, as if the media frames were to conjure the military response that eventually followed. From September 11 to and through the Afghan Terror War, the networks generated escalating fear and hysteria demanding military response, while the mouthpieces of the military-industrial complex demanded military action with little serious reflection on its consequences visible on the television

networks. There was, by contrast, much intelligent discussion on the Internet, showing the dangers of the take-over of broadcasting by corporations who would profit by war and upheaval.¹²

Bush Family Media Spectacles

War itself has become a media spectacle in which successive U.S. regimes have used military extravaganzas to promote their agendas. The Reagan administration repeatedly used military spectacle to deflect attention from its foreign policy and economic problems. And two Bush administrations and the Clinton administration famously “wagged the dog,” using military spectacle to deflect attention from embarrassing domestic or foreign policy blunders, or in Clinton’s case, a sex scandal that threatened him with impeachment (Kellner 2003a).

The Gulf War of 1990-1991 was the major media spectacle of its era, captivating global audiences, and seeming to save the first Bush presidency, before the war’s ambiguous outcome and a declining economy helped defeat the Bush presidential campaign of 1992. In the summer of 1990, the elder Bush’s popularity was declining, he had promised “no new taxes” and then raised taxes, and it appeared that he would not be re-elected. Bush senior’s salvation seemed to appear in the figure of Saddam Hussein and his August 1990 invasion of Kuwait that allowed Bush to organize a military intervention to displace him.

Bush and the Reagan administration had supported Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988 and Bush senior continued to provide loans and programs that enabled Hussein to build up his military during his presidency (Kellner 1992 and Friedman 1993). When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Bush mobilized an international coalition to wage war to oust the Iraqis from its neighboring oil emirate, demonizing Hussein as “another Hitler” and major threat to world peace and the global economy. Bush refused serious diplomatic efforts to induce Iraq to leave Kuwait, constantly insulting the Iraqi leader rather than pursuing diplomatic mediation. Instead, Bush appeared to want a war to increase U.S. power in the region, to promote U.S. military clout as the dominant global police force, to save his own failing political fortunes, and to exert more U.S. influence over oil supplies and policies (Kellner 1992). The televised drama of the 1991 Gulf War provided exciting media spectacles that engrossed a global audience and that seemed to ensure Bush’s re-election (he enjoyed 90% popularity at the end of the war).

After the war, in an exuberant rush of enthusiasm, Bush senior and his national security advisor Brent Scowcroft proclaimed a “New World Order” in which U.S. military power would be used to settle conflicts, solve problems, and assert the U.S. as the hegemonic force in the world. Such a dream was not (yet) to be, however, as the Gulf War peace negotiations allowed Saddam Hussein to keep power and the U.S. failed to aid Shiite forces in the south and Kurds in the north of Iraq to overthrow Hussein. Images of

the slaughter of Kurds and Shiites throughout the global media provided negative images that helped code the 1991 Gulf War as a failure, or extremely limited success. Hence, the negative spectacle of a messy endgame to the war and the continued reign in Iraq of Saddam Hussein, combined with a poor economy helped defeat the elder Bush in 1992.

At the time of the September 11 terror attacks, Bush junior faced the same failing prospects that his father confronted in the summer of 1990. The economy was suffering one of the worst declines in U.S. history, and after ramming through a rightwing agenda on behalf of the corporations that had supported his 2000 election (Kellner 2001), Bush lost control of the political agenda when a republican senator, James Jeffords, defected to the Democrats in May 2001. But the September 11 terror attacks provided an opportunity for George W. Bush to re-seize political initiative and to boost his popularity.

The brief war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan from early October through December 2001 appeared to be a military victory for the U.S. After a month of stalemate following ruthless U.S. bombing, the Taliban collapsed in the north of the country, abandoned the capital Kabul, and surrendered in its southern strongholds (Kellner, 2003). Yet the Afghanistan Terror War, like the elder Bush's Gulf War, was ambiguous in its outcome. Although the Taliban regime which hosted Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda collapsed under U.S. military pressure, the top leaders and many militants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban escaped and the country remains perilous and chaotic. Violent warlords that the U.S. used to fight Al Qaeda exert oppressive power and keep the country in a state of disarray, while sympathizers for Al Qaeda and the Taliban continue to wield power and destabilize the country. Because the U.S. did not use ground troops or multilateral military forces, the top leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaeda escaped, Pakistan was allowed to send in planes that took out hundreds of Pakistanis and numerous top Al Qaeda militants, and Afghanistan remains a dangerous and unruly territory (Kellner, 2003).

While the 1991 Gulf War produced spectacles of precision-bombs and missiles destroying Iraqi targets and the brief spectacle of the flight of the Iraqis from Kuwait and the liberation of Kuwait City, the Afghanistan war was more hidden in its unfolding and effects. Many of the images of Afghanistan that circulated through the global media were of civilian casualties caused by U.S. bombing and daily pictures of thousands of refugees from war and suffering of the Afghanistan people raised questions concerning the U.S. strategy and intervention. Moreover, just as the survival of Saddam Hussein ultimately coded Gulf War I as problematic, so do did the continued existence of Osama bin Laden and his top Al Qaeda leadership point to limitations of the younger Bush's leadership and policies.

By early 2002, George W. Bush faced a situation similar to that of his father after the Gulf War. Despite victory against the Taliban, the limited success of the war and a failing economy provided a situation that threatened W's re-election. Thus Bush Junior

needed a dramatic media spectacle that would guarantee his election and once again Saddam Hussein provided a viable candidate. Consequently, in his January 20, 2002 State of the Union address, Bush made threatening remarks about an “axis of evil” confronting the U.S., including Iraq, Iran, and North Korea.

As 2002 unfolded, the Bush administration intensified its ideological war against Iraq, advanced its doctrine of preemptive strikes, and provided military build-up for what now looks like inevitable war against Iraq. While the explicit war aims were to shut down Iraq’s “weapons of mass destruction,” and thus enforce UN resolutions, which mandated that Iraq eliminate its offensive weapons, there were many hidden agendas in the Bush administration offensive against Iraq. To be re-elected Bush needed a major victory and symbolic triumph over terrorism in order to deflect from the failings of his regime both domestically and in the realm of foreign policy.

Indeed, in the global arena, Bush appears to be the most hated U.S. president of modern times and anti-Americanism is on the rise throughout the world. Moreover, ideologues within the Bush administration wanted to legitimate a policy of preemptive strikes and a successful attack on Iraq could inaugurate and normalize this policy. Some of the same militarist unilateralists in the Bush administration envisage U.S. world hegemony, the elder Bush’s “New World Order,” with the U.S. as the reigning military power and world’s policeman (Kellner, 2003b). Increased control of the world’s oil supplies provided a tempting prize for the former oil executives who maintain key roles in the Bush administration. And, finally, one might note the Oedipus Tex drama, where George W. Bush’s desires to conclude his father’s unfinished business and simultaneously defeat Evil to constitute himself as Good helped drive him to war against Iraq with the fervor of a religious Crusade.

With all these agendas in play, a war on Iraq appears to have been inevitable. Bush's March 6, 2003 press conference made it evident that he was ready to go to war against Iraq. His handlers told him to speak slowly and keep his big stick and Texas macho out of view, but he constantly threatened Iraq and evoked the rhetoric of good and evil that he used to justify his crusade against bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Bush repeated the words "Saddam Hussein" and "terrorism" incessantly, mentioning Iraq as a “threat” at least sixteen times, which he attempted to link with the September 11 attacks and terrorism. He used the word "I" as in "I believe" countless times, and talked of "my government" as if he owned it, depicting a man lost in words and self-importance, positioning himself against the “evil” that he was preparing to wage war against. Unable to make an intelligent and objective case for a war against Iraq, Bush could only invoke fear and a moralistic rhetoric, attempting to present himself as a strong nationalist leader.

Bush’s rhetoric, like that of fascism, deploys a mistrust and hatred of language, reducing it to manipulative speechifying, speaking in codes, repeating the same phrases over and over. This is grounded in anti-intellectualism and hatred of democracy and

intellectuals. It is clearly evident in Bush's press conferences and snitty responses to questions and general contempt for the whole procedure. It plays to anti-intellectual proclivities and tendencies in the extreme conservative and fundamentalist Christian constituencies who support him. It appears that Bush's press conference was orchestrated to shore up his base and prepare his supporters for a major political struggle rather than to marshal arguments to convince those opposed to go to war with Iraq that it was a good idea. He displayed, against his will, the complete poverty of his case to go to war against Iraq, he had no convincing arguments, nothing new to communicate, and just repeated the same tired cliches over and over.

Bush's discourse also displayed Orwellian features of Doublespeak where war against Iraq is for peace, the occupation of Iraq is its liberation, destroying its food and water supplies enables "humanitarian" action, and where the murder of countless Iraqis and destruction of the country will produce "freedom" and "democracy." In a pre-war summit with Tony Blair in the Azores and in his first talk after the bombing began Bush went on and on about the "coalition of the willing" and how many countries were supporting and participating in the "allied" effort. In fact, however, it was a Coalition of Two, with the U.S. and UK doing most of the fighting and with many of the countries that Bush claimed supported his war quickly backtracking and expressing reservations about the highly unpopular assault that was strongly opposed by most people and countries in the world.

On March 19, the media spectacle of the war against Iraq unfolded with a dramatic attempt to "decapitate" the Iraqi regime. Large numbers of missiles were aimed at targets in Baghdad where Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi leadership were believed to be staying and the tens of thousands of ground troops on the Kuwait-Iraq border poised for invasion entered Iraq in a blitzkrieg toward Baghdad.¹³ The media followed the Bush administration and Pentagon slogan of "shock and awe" and presented the war against Iraq as a great military spectacle, as triumphalism marked the opening days of the U.S. bombing of Iraq and invasion.

The Al Jazeera network live coverage of the bombing of a palace belonging to the Hussein family was indeed shocking as loud explosions and blasts jolted viewers throughout the world. Whereas some Western audiences experienced this bombing positively as a powerful assault on "evil," for Arab audiences it was experienced as an attack on the body of the Arab and Muslim people, just as the September 11 terror attacks were experienced by Americans as assaults on the very body and symbols of the United States. While during Gulf War I, CNN was the only network live in Baghdad and throughout the war framed the images, discourses, and spectacle, there were over twenty broadcasting networks in Baghdad for the 2003 Iraq war, including several Arab networks, and the different TV companies presented the war quite diversely.

Al Jazeera and other Arab networks, as well as some European networks, talked of an “invasion” and an illegal U.S. and British assault on Iraq. While U.S. TV networks presented a “War in Iraq” or “Operation Iraqi Freedom” as the framing concepts, the Canadian CBC used a frame the “War on Iraq,” and Arab and other global networks spoke of an “invasion” and “occupation.” While Donald Rumsfeld bragged that the bombings were the most precise in history and were aimed at military and not civilian targets, Arab and various global broadcasting networks focused on civilian casualties and presented painful spectacles of Iraqis suffering from the US bombing. Moreover, to the surprise of many, after a triumphant march across the Kuwaiti border and rush to Baghdad, the U.S. and British forces began to take casualties, and during the weekend of March 22-23, images of their P.O.W.s and dead bodies of their soldiers were shown throughout the world. Moreover, the Iraqis began angrily resisting and rather than cheering for British and U.S. forces to enter the southern city of Basra, there was significant resistance throughout southern Iraq.

Soon after, an immense sandstorm slowed down the march on Baghdad and images of Iraqi civilians maimed or killed by U.S. and British bombing, accounts of mishaps, stalled and overextended supply lines, and unexpected dangers to the invading forces created a tremendously dramatic story. The intensity and immediacy of the spectacle was multiplied by “embedded reporters” who were occupying the U.S. and British forces and who beamed back live pictures, first of the triumphant blitzkrieg through Iraq and then of the invading forces stalling and subject to perilous counterattack.

A great debate emerged around the embedded reporters and whether journalists who depended on the protection of the U.S. and British military, lived with the troops, and signed papers agreeing to a rigorous set of restrictions on their reporting could be objective and critical of their protectors. From the beginning, it was clear that the embedded reporters were indeed “in bed with” their military escorts and as the U.S. and Britain stormed into Iraq, the reporters presented exultant and triumphant accounts that trumped any paid propagandist. The embedded U.S. network television reporters were gung ho cheerleaders and spinners for the U.S. and UK military and lost all veneer of objectivity. But as the blitzkrieg stalled, a sandstorm hit, and U.S. and British forces came under attack, the embedded reporters reflected genuine fear, helped capture the chaos of war, provided often vivid accounts of the fighting, and occasionally, as I note below, deflated a propaganda lie of the U.S. or U.K. military.

Indeed, U.S. and British military discourse was exceptionally mendacious, as happens so often in recent wars that are as much for public opinion and political agendas as for military goals. British and U.S. sources claimed the first days into Iraq that the border port of Umm Qasar and major southern city of Basra were under coalition control, whereas TV images showed quite the opposite. When things went very bad for U.S. and British forces on March 23, a story originated from an embedded reporter with the Jerusalem Post that a “huge” chemical weapons production facility was found, a story

allegedly confirmed by a Pentagon source to the Fox TV military correspondent who quickly spread it through the U.S. media (BBC was skeptical from the beginning).¹⁴

When U.S. officials denied that they were responsible for major civilian atrocities in two Baghdad bombings the week of March 24, reporters on the scene described witnesses to planes flying overhead and in one case found pieces of a missile with U.S. markings and numbers on it. And after a suicide bombing killed four U.S. troops at a checkpoint in late March, U.S. soldiers fired on a vehicle that ran a checkpoint and killed seven civilians. The U.S. military claimed that it had fired a warning shot, but a Washington Post reporter on the scene reported that a senior U.S. military official had shouted to a younger soldier to fire a warning shot first and then yelled that “you [expletive] killed them” when he failed to do so. Embedded newspaper reporters also often provided more vivid accounts of “friendly fire” and other mishaps, getting their information from troops on the ground and on the site, instead of from military spinners who tended to be propagandists.¹⁵

Hence, the embedded and other reporters on the site provided documentation of the more raw and brutal aspects of war and telling accounts that often put in question official versions of the events, as well as propaganda and military spin. But since their every posting and broadcast was censored by the U.S. military it was the independent “unilateral” journalists who provided the most accurate account of the horrors of the war and the Coalition of Two military mishaps. Thus, on the whole the embedded journalists were largely propagandists who often outdid the Pentagon and Bush administration in spinning the message of the moment.

Moreover, the U.S. broadcast networks, on the whole, tended to be more embedded in the Pentagon and Bush administration than the reporters in the field and print journalists. The military commentators on all networks provided little more than the Pentagon spin of the moment and often repeated gross lies and propaganda, as in the examples mentioned above concerning the U.S. bombing of civilians or the checkpoint shooting of innocents. Entire networks like Fox and the NBC cable networks provided little but propaganda and one-sided patriotism, as did, for the most part CNN. All these 24/7 cable networks, as well as the big three U.S. broadcasting networks, tended to provide highly sanitized views of the war, rarely showing Iraqi casualties, thus producing a view of the war totally different than that shown in other parts of the world.

The dramatic story of “Saving Private Lynch” was one of the more spectacular human-interest stories of the war that revealed the constructed and spectacle nature of the event and ways that the Pentagon constructed mythologies that were replicated by the TV networks. Private Jessica Lynch was one of the first American POWs shown on Iraqi TV and since she was young, female, and attractive, her fate became a topic of intense interest. Stories circulated that she was shot and stabbed and was tortured by Iraqis holding her in captivity.¹⁶ Eight days after her capture, the U.S. media broadcast footage

of her dramatic rescue, obviously staged like a reality TV spectacle. Soldiers stormed the hospital, found Lynch, and claimed a dramatic rescue under fire from Iraqis. In fact, several media institutions interviewed the doctors in the hospital who claimed that Iraqi troops had left the hospital two days before, that the hospital staff had tried to take Jessica to the Americans but they fired on them, and that in the “rescue” the U.S. troops shot through the doors, terrorized doctors and patients, and created a dangerous scene that could have resulted in deaths, simply to get some dramatic rescue footage for TV audiences.¹⁷

The Fox network was especially gung ho, militarist and aggressive, yet Fox footage shown on April 5-6, 2003 of the daring U.S. incursion into Baghdad displayed a road strewn with destroyed Iraqi vehicles, burning buildings, and Iraqi corpses. This live footage, replayed for days, caught something of the carnage of the high-tech slaughter and destruction of Iraq that the U.S. networks tended to neglect. And an Oliver North commentary to footage of a U.S. warplane blasting away one Iraqi tank and armored vehicle after another put on display the high-tech massacre of a completely asymmetrical war in which the Iraqi military had no chance whatsoever against the U.S. war machine.

U.S. military commanders claimed that in the initial foray into Baghdad 2,000-3,000 Iraqis were killed suggesting that the broadcasting networks were not really showing the brutality and carnage of the war. Indeed, most of the bombing of Iraqi military forces was invisible and dead Iraqis were rarely shown. An embedded CNN reporter, Walter Rogers, later recounted that the one time his report showed a dead Iraqi the CNN switchboard “lit up like a Christmas tree” with angry viewers demanding that CNN not show any dead bodies, as if the U.S. audience wanted to be in denial concerning the human costs of the war.¹⁸

An April 6 interview on Fox with Forbes magazine publisher and former presidential candidate Steve Forbes made it clear that the U.S. intended to get all the contracts on rebuilding Iraq for American firms, that Iraqi debts held by French and Russians should be cancelled, and that to the victors would go all the spoils of war. Such discourse put on display the arrogance and greed that drove the U.S. effort and subverted all idealistic rhetoric about democracy and freedom for the Iraqis. The very brutality of Fox war pornography graphically displayed the horrors of war and the militarist, gloating, and barbaric discourse that accompanied the slaughter of Iraqis and destruction of the country showed the New Barbarism that characterized the Bush era.¹⁹

Comparing American broadcasting networks with the BBC, Canadian, and other outlets as I did during the opening weeks of the U.S. war against Iraq showed two different wars being presented. The U.S. networks tended to ignore Iraqi casualties, Arab outrage about the war, global antiwar and anti-U.S. protests, and the negative features of the war, while the BBC and Canadian CBC often featured these more critical themes. As noted, various countries and networks framed the war very differently, while analysts

noted that in Arab countries the war was presented as an invasion of Iraq, slaughter of its peoples, and destruction of the country.

On the whole, U.S. broadcasting networks tended to present a sanitized view of the war while Canadian, British and other European, and Arab broadcasting presented copious images of civilian casualties and the horrors of war. U.S. television coverage tended toward pro-military patriotism, propaganda, and technological fetishism, celebrating the weapons of war and military humanism, highlighting the achievements and heroism of the U.S. military. Other global broadcasting networks, however, were highly critical of the U.S. and U.K. military and often presented highly negative spectacles of the assault on Iraq and the shock and awe high-tech massacre.

In a sense, the U.S. and UK war on Iraq found itself in a double bind. The more thoroughly they annihilated Iraqi troops and conquered the country, the more aggressive, bullying, and imperialist they would appear to the rest of the world. Yet the dramatic pictures of civilian casualties and harrowing images of U.S. bombing and destruction of Iraq made it imperative to end the war as soon as possible. An apparently failed attempt to kill Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi leadership on April 7th, destroyed a civilian area and killed a number of people, followed by the killing of journalists in two separate episodes by the U.S. military on April 8, produced an extremely negative media spectacle of the war on Iraq. But the apparent collapse of the Iraqi regime on April 9, where for the first time there were significant images of Iraqis celebrating the demise of Hussein, provided the material for a spectacle of victory.

Indeed, the destruction of a statue of Saddam Hussein on live global television provided precisely the images desired by the Pentagon and Bush administration. Closer analysis of this spectacle revealed, however, that rather than displaying a mass uprising of Iraqis against the Baath regime, there were relatively few people assaulting the Hussein statue. Analysis of the pictures in the square revealed that there was only a relatively small crowd around the statue of Saddam Hussein while most of the square was empty. Those attacking the statue were largely members of the U.S.-supported Iraqi National Congress, including its infamous leader Ahmed Chalabi and another member shown in the crowd who attempted to pass himself off as the “mayor” of Baghdad, until U.S. military forces restrained him. Moreover, the few Iraqis attacking the statue were unable to destroy it, until some U.S. soldiers on the scene used their tank and cable to pull it down. In a semiotic slip, one soldier briefly put a U.S. flag on top of Hussein’s head, providing an iconic image for Arab networks and others of a U.S. occupation and take-over of Iraq.

Subsequent images of looting, anarchy and chaos throughout Iraq, however, including the looting of the National Museum, the National Archive that contained rare books and historical documents, and the Ministry for Religious Affairs, which contained rare religious material, created extremely negative impressions.²⁰ Likewise, growing Iraqi demonstrations over the U.S. occupation and continued violence throughout the country

put on view a highly uncertain situation in which the spectacle of victory and the triumph of Bush administration and Pentagon policy might be put into question, domestically as well as globally.

For weeks after the fall of the Iraqi regime negative images continued to circulate of clashes between Iraqis and the U.S. forces, gigantic Shia demonstrations and celebrations that produced the specter of the growing of radical Islamic power in the region, and the continued failure to produce security and stability. The spectacle of Shia on the march and taking over power in many regions of the country created worries that “democracy” in Iraqi could produce religious fundamentalist regimes. This negative spectacle suggests the limitations of a politics of the spectacle that can backfire, spiral out of control, and generate unintended consequences.

Attempting to counter the negative spectacle, the Bush administration attempted on May 1 to organize a positive spectacle of Bush piloting a naval aircraft onto the USS Abraham Lincoln. In this carefully orchestrated media event, Bush emerged in full Top Gun regalia from a jet plane with “Navy One” and “George W. Bush, Commander-in-Chief” logos. Strutting out of the aircraft helmet in hand, Bush crossed the flight deck accompanied by a cheering crowd and with full TV coverage that had been anticipating the big event for hours. Delivering a canned speech from a podium with a giant banner “Mission Accomplished” behind him Bush declared that the “major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.”²¹

In Gulf War I, the Iraqi flight from its occupation of Kuwait and apparent military defeat of the Iraqi regime was followed by images of Shi’ite and Kurdish uprisings and their violent suppression by the Saddam Hussein regime, ultimately coding the Gulf War as ambiguous and contributing to George H.W. Bush’s defeat in 1992. Likewise, while the September 11 terror attacks on the U.S. by the Al Qaeda network appeared to be a triumph of the Islamic radicals, worldwide revulsion against the attacks and the global and multilateral attempts to close down its networks ultimately appear to have seriously weakened the Al Qaeda forces. Politics of the spectacle are thus highly ambiguous and unstable, subject to multiple interpretations, and generate ambiguous and often unanticipated effects, as when the Republican attempts to use Bill Clinton’s sexual escapades to promote his impeachment backfired and created sympathy and support for him.

Media spectacles can backfire and are subject to dialectical reversal as positive images give way to negative ones. They are difficult to control and manage, and can be subject to different framings and interpretations, as when non-U.S. broadcasting networks focus on civilian casualties, looting and chaos, and U.S. military crimes against Iraqis rather than the U.S. victory and the evils of Saddam Hussein. Of course, the capture on Hussein on December 15 created a major propaganda victory for the Bush administration but it remains to be seen to what extent Saddam’s capture will seriously curtail Iraqi

resistance to the US occupation, help provide legitimacy and support for the new Iraqi government, and help generate the stability that has so far eluded the US and British efforts at pacification. It is obviously too soon to determine the effects of the 2003 Iraq war, but the consequences are likely to be complex and unforeseen, thus rendering claims that the adventure represents a great victory premature and possibly quite erroneous.

Concluding Comments

Obviously, multifaceted global events like the two Bush administration wars against Iraq are highly complex and have a wealth of underlying factors. Thus it would be a mistake to suggest that one single factor, like the control of oil or domestic political goals, were the key motivations for either of the two wars against Iraq carried out by Bush family administrations. Complex historical events are overdetermined and require multicausal analyses (Kellner 1992 and 2003b).

Yet in a highly saturated media environment, successful political projects require carefully planned and executed media spectacles. In this study, I have suggested that both the September 11 terror attacks and the Bush family's wars against Iraq were prime examples of such spectacles. Both Al Qaeda terrorists and the two Bush administrations have used media spectacles to promote their highly controversial agendas. Hence, during an era of Terror War, politics are increasingly mediated and constituted by the production of spectacular media events and the political agendas of their producers.

In the U.S. and elsewhere, the corporate media have followed the Bush administration in demonizing bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and terrorism, while celebrating U.S. military interventions. A critical cultural studies, however, should dissect dominant discourses, images, and spectacles of all contending sides, denoting manipulation, propaganda, and questionable policies. Throughout my recent work, I have suggested that multilateralism is the appropriate global response to such problems as terrorism and despotic political regimes, and that global institutions and not the unilateralism of U.S. economic and militaristic intervention should be the forum for searching out and working through the transnational problems that affect us all (Kellner, 2003b).

In a mediated world in which only a few — and increasingly, fewer -- media corporations control the broadcasting and print media the Internet provides the best source of alternative information. It offers a wealth of opinion and debate, and a variety of sites that presents material for a better-informed public and the organization of political alternatives to the current U.S. regime (Kellner 2001 and 2003b). Although there is a frightening amount of misinformation and reactionary discourse on the Internet, it also provides users the potential to become literate and informed on a variety of important topics. Indeed, the Internet has played a key role in nurturing the anti-corporate globalization and global justice movements, and is playing an important role in facilitating the development of a global anti-war movement.

Further, the global peace movement that has been constituting itself as a counterspectacle to Islamic terrorism and Bush militarism signals a democratic alternative to war. The spectacle of millions demonstrating against an attack on Iraq in 2003, activists going to Iraq to serve as human shields against U.S. and British bombing, and the daily protests erupting throughout everyday life present opposition to war and struggles for peace and democracy. On the eve of Bush Junior's assault on Iraq, a virtual protest sent millions of e-mail and telephone calls to Washington to protest an impending Iraq attack and the beginnings of a global peace movement numbering millions was evident. While the counterspectacle for peace was not able to stop the Bush administration's rush to war, it empowered countries and global organization to oppose the war and has mobilized constituencies that may eventually block the Bush administration's problematic attempt at global hegemony.

It is clear that Bush administration Terror War policy envisages an era of perpetual war against terrorism and the countries that support terror, a situation in which media spectacle will be used to promote policies of unilateral aggression. One hopes that counterspectacles of peace and opposition to Terror War will grow in force and that new media like the Internet will be used as democratic tools to prevent the unleashing of a totalizing and hegemonic political vision of "us versus them" and "good versus evil" that the Bush administration is promoting. For such perennial war truly portends historical regression on a frightening scale and threatens the world with genocide and an endless spectacle of violence and destruction.²²

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Notes

¹ This study draws upon my books Television and the Crisis of Democracy (Kellner 1990); The Persian Gulf TV War (Kellner 1992); Grand Theft 2000 (Kellner 2001); Media Spectacle (Kellner 2003a); and From 9/11 to Terror War: Dangers of the Bush Legacy (Kellner 2003b). Thanks to Phil Graham for helpful comments that aided in the revision of the paper.

² See Collins in Collins and Glover 2002: 155-174. Collins and Glover's collection Collateral Language interrogates many of the concepts used in post-9/11 political discourse, highlighting the importance of language in the mobilizing of political consensus, the legitimization of policies, and the very construction of political realities. In my study, I will interrogate how both Al Qaeda and two Bush administrations have used spectacles of terror to promote their policies and will deconstruct some of their discourse and the ways that it was presented and circulated in the US and global media.

³ For histories of the Al Qaeda network, see Kempel 2002 and Rashid 2001 and 2002.

⁴ In Winter 2001, I attended a three-part symposium telecast live in the Beverly Hills Museum of Radio and Television which included media executives and broadcasters throughout the world who described how they processed the events of September 11. Representatives from Canada, European countries, China, and elsewhere described how they got footage to broadcast, how the story dominated their respective media sources, and how the story was truly global in reach. An archive is collecting video and commentary on September 11 broadcasting throughout the world available at <http://www.911digitalarchive.org/> and <http://tvnews3.televisionarchive.org/tvarchive/html/index.html>.

⁵ In this section I am indebted to students of my UCLA Cultural Studies seminar and to Richard Kahn who developed a Web-site where the class posted material relating to the September 11 events and Afghan war; the following study draws on this material that can be found at:

<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/ed270/index.html>

⁶ For critique of Huntington “civilization” vs “barbarism” discourse see Chomsky 2001; Achcar 2002; and Kellner 2003b.

⁷ For systematic analysis of Bushspeak and its Orwellian lineage, see Kellner 2001.

⁸ Shortly after this and other outbursts, Coulter was fired from National Review when she reacted violently to efforts to tone down her rhetoric by the editors, helping to provide her with martyr status for the U.S. right. Later, Coulter stated in a speech that American Taliban John Walker Lindh should be executed so that liberals and the left can get the message that they can be killed if they get out of line!! For systematic critique of Coulter and other extreme right media pundits, see Franken 2003.

⁹ The Bush-Baker-Carlyle connection, Cheney-Halliburton, and Rumsfeld and Bechtel connections are documented in many English newspapers, the New York Times, and other sources, collected on www.bushwatch.com and Phil Agre’s Red Rock Eater list collected at <http://dliis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/rre.html>. See also Melanie Warner, “The Big Guys Work for the Carlyle Group,” Fortune (March 18, 2002) and Kellner, 2003b. On Bechtel, Rumsfeld, and oil, see David Lindorff, “Secret Bechtel Documents Reveal: Yes, it is about Oil,” Counterpunch Special Report (April 9, 2003) at <http://www.counterpunch.org/lindorff04092003.html>.

¹⁰ During the Afghanistan war, Sir Michael Howard, the eminent British historian, gave a talk that was widely reproduced and discussed in the print media and Internet against calling the terror attacks “war”. Howard argued that it was “a terrible and irrevocable error” to refer to the current campaign against terrorism as a “war,” rather than a criminal action, since it bestowed unwarranted legitimacy on the terrorists, mythologized them within the Arab and Western world, and created unrealistic expectations for successful military action and victory. Describing the American bombing as “like trying to eradicate cancer cells with a blowtorch,” Howard argued that a “police operation conducted under the auspices of the United Nation” would have been far preferable. Howard’s speech was

published on www.thisislondon.com on October 31 and was widely distributed on the Internet.

¹¹ For my previous accounts of the media and the crisis of democracy, see Kellner 1990, 1992, 2001, and 2003b.

¹² This situation calls attention once again to the major contradiction of the present age in regard to information and knowledge. On one hand, the U.S. has available the most striking array of information, opinions, debate, and sources of knowledge of any society in history with its profusion of print journalism, books, articles, and Internet sources in contrast to the poverty of information and opinion on television. This is truly a scandal and a contradiction in the construction of contemporary consciousness and political culture. Thus, while television functioned largely as propaganda, spectacle, and the producer of mass hysteria, close to brain-washing, fortunately, there is a wealth of informed analysis and interpretation available in print media and on the Internet, as well as a respectable archive of books and articles on the complexity of U.S. foreign policy and Middle East history (see Kellner 2003b).

¹³ On May 28, 2003, CBS News reported that no bunker, bodies, or evidence that Saddam Hussein or his family was at the site bombed the opening night of the war was found.

¹⁴ Soon after, British and then U.S. military sources affirmed that the site was not a chemical weapons production or storage facility. For a critique of a series of “smoking gun” discoveries of weapons of mass destruction facilities and their subsequent debunking, see Jake Tapper, “WMD, MIA?” Salon (April 16, 2003) and “Angry Allies” Salon (May 30, 2003).

¹⁵ On the Baghdad bombings, see the reporting of Robert Fisk in the London Independent and for the story that questioned official U.S. military accounts of the checking shootings of a civilian family, see William Branigin, “A Gruesome Scene on Highway 9,” Washington Post (April 1, 2003).

¹⁶ A Washington Post April 3 story by Susan Schmidt and Vernon Loeb headlined “She was fighting to her death” was based on unnamed military sources and claimed that Lynch “continued firing at the Iraqis even after she sustained multiple gunshot wounds” and that she was stabbed by Iraqis who captured her. In fact, Lynch’s vehicle took a wrong turn, overturned, and she was hurt in the accident not fighting Iraqis. See the sources in the next note.

¹⁷ See Mitch Potter, “The real ‘Saving Pte. Lynch,’” Toronto Star (May 5, 2003); the Associated Press also confirmed this story, as did the BBC on May 15, CBS News on May 29, and interviews with Jessica Lynch on ABC in November 2003 as she promoted a co-authored book on her experiences.

¹⁸ Rogers was interviewed on Howard Kurtz’s poorly named CNN media review “Reliable Sources” on April 27, 2003.

¹⁹ For systematic analysis of the New Barbarism accompanying and in part generated by the Bush administration and their hardright supporters, see Kellner, 2003b. See Jim Rutenberg, “Cable’s War Coverage Suggests a New ‘Fox Effect’ on Television” (New

York Times, April 16, 2003). Rutenberg provides examples of Fox's aggressively opinionated and biased discourse, as when anchor Neil Cavuto said of those who oppose the war on Iraq: "You were sickening then, you are sickening now." Fox's high ratings during the war influenced CNN and the NBC networks to be more patriotic and dismissive of those who criticized the war and its aftermath.

²⁰ Evidently, the museum community thought it had an understanding with the US military of the need to preserve Iraqi national treasures which were allowed by the US military to be looted and destroyed while they protected the Petroleum Ministry; see <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/16/international/worldspecial/16MUSE.html?pagewanted=print&position=>. On the looting of the Ministry for Religious Affairs, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/16/international/worldspecial/16BAGH.html?pagewanted=print&position=>. Later reports indicated that some of the museum artifacts believed destroyed were hidden, but there were also reports of continued looting of Iraqi archaeological sites throughout the country that were not protected by the U.S.; see Edmund L. Andrews, "Iraqi Looters Tearing Up Archaeological Sites," New York Times (May 23, 2003).

²¹ When Bush was asked whether the mission in Iraq had indeed been accomplished as the banner proclaimed at an October 28, 2003 press conference, Bush snippily remarked "The 'Mission Accomplished' sign, of course, was put up by the members of the USS Abraham Lincoln saying that their mission was accomplished. I know it was attributed somehow to some ingenious advance man from staff." In fact, the Bush administration had orchestrated every detail of the spectacle; see Elisabeth Bumiller, "Keepers of Bush image lift stagecraft to new heights," New York Times, Friday, May 16.

²² On Bush administration doctrines of perpetual war, see Vidal 2002 and 2003.