

Letters on the US war in Afghanistan and the case of John Walker Lindh

1 February 2002

I have read with interest your article concerning the Taliban and Al Qaeda personnel being held at Guantanamo Bay. I think your comments are well intentioned but completely oblivious to the fundamental issue of how to stop these guys doing it again.

There is little doubt that Al Qaeda and its supporters are a terrorist organisation. Its ends may in fact be reasonable in some eyes, but its preferred means are beyond the pale of just about every society. People who have volunteered for this group (and let's face it, no one is made to join it) have to be considered supporters of its methods of operation and therefore active supporters of terrorism.

The current situation does not fit neatly into the framework of the Geneva Convention (GC). Are the detainees prisoners of war? I do not think so. The GC grew out of a concept of wars between nations where the poor common foot soldier had no part in creating the conflict and in most cases did not want to be there. The situation in Afghanistan is not a war between nations and the detainees are not the common foot soldiers envisaged by the GC.

In my view, the world needs to come up with an innovative solution to deal with these fighters for the practical reason that if they are released, there is every reason to believe they will resume their terrorist activity. This is simply unacceptable. Jurists may argue long about rights, etc., but in the end, laws exist to protect society. Any legal argument that concludes that a bunch of natural born killers can be let loose on the world has to be fundamentally wrong.

There is precedent for such innovation. Towards the end of World War II, the Allied powers announced they would bring to trial those Axis leaders responsible for starting the conflict. There was no modern precedent for this. In previous "civilised" wars, the defeated leaders often went back their estates while their common countrymen suffered the fallout. The propagators of war were finally made to pay for their acts. Some experts in international law have had issues with the Nuremberg trials, but the option of letting those Nazis walk free was something most people could not countenance.

The correct approach in my view is for a Nuremberg-style tribunal prosecuting a charge of actively supporting a terrorist organisation. The proof can be simple—did the organisation carry out terrorist acts and was the defendant a member of it. The punishment, if found guilty, would be a nice long jail sentence. This may discourage future volunteers.

Another argument you may wish to consider is that if the detainees are prisoners of war, they are prisoners of the war against terrorism. The GC permits POWs to be held until the cessation of hostilities. I suspect the detainees will be very old men before the war on terrorism is over.

Yours sincerely,

MH

Sydney, Australia

24 January 2002

Mr. Walsh, another fine article. I have listened to CNN, BBC and Fox TV for just a shred of balance and so far have found none. I hope, but do not expect, your article will have a wide reception in the American media

and public. Every day I am more thankful that I have access to wsws.org.

B

25 January 2002

Dear Editor:

This email will serve two purposes: first, to express my appreciation for your organization's hard work as well as for the informed, reasoned, and well-written articles that result from it.

My second purpose concerns the aforementioned article, ["The Bush administration and John Walker Lindh: who are the real 'conspirators'?"] where the author, David Walsh, opines that the Justice Department's decision not to pursue charges of outright treason against John Walker may be seen as evidence of their weak position. This conjecture echoes the many discussions conducted elsewhere in the commercial media (and, in particular, talk radio) as to why Walker was charged with conspiracy and providing material support but not treason.

It is my understanding that Article III, Section 3 of the US Constitution, which defines the crime of treason, has been interpreted by the courts to mean that a citizen can only commit treason when the US is in a *declared* state of war. Based on this understanding, I have concluded that the speculation of the commercial media on this point evidenced either their carelessness or their mendacity, and, certainly, their desire to inflame the public against John Walker.

I am, however, not a constitutional lawyer and David Walsh's article has given strength to the gnawing doubt I have had amidst all the recent speculation that I may be mistaken on this point. My source on this point was not only a former lawyer but also an individual not given to making factual statements carelessly. He was one of my History professors and he was making a point about why no one was charged with treason during the Vietnam "War." Unfortunately, he is also now deceased.

Should I be correct on this point, it would be an important piece of information, especially in consideration that the officials in the Justice Department and elsewhere must be aware of it, as would—one might expect—many in the media; their silence on the issue would speak volumes.

I'm sure your resources and connections dwarf my own. Accordingly, I ask whether you would investigate this issue further.

Sincerely,

JS

25 January 2002

Hello,

I am in complete agreement with your article "The Bush administration and John Walker Lindh: who are the real 'conspirators'?"

It's something that needs to be brought to the attention of Americans everywhere; mainstream journalism needs to speak up. America and its leaders have become the enemies of freedom.

Thank you!

A

25 January 2002

Thank you so much for the coverage in the articles, "Was the US

government alerted to September 11 attack?" This information is so wonderful to have. I appreciate your work. This is the sort of historical scandal history books will discuss in detail!

JMB

25 January 2002

Best display of journalistic integrity I've ever seen—Kudos!

Believe it or not, there is a tiny amount of *ordinary* American citizens that harbor the truth. We harbor it in quite the same manner as other [more blatantly] persecuted citizens of our supposed enemy countries do. We are afraid to speak. We cannot get a book published (because we are ordinary citizens without connections in the ongoing chess game global domination). There thrives a tiny amount of us who know the schemes, the players, the divisions, the pecking order, the secrets ... in brief: the whole truth. Not the partial truth, not the usual conspiracy theories (David Duke, Van Impe, Black Islamist fundamentals, and that one guy that rattles about extraterrestrials with attractive names who are the ultimate controllers)

Some of these guys *are* the players; some are merely the pawns. Some of us know who is who and what is what. Unfortunately, we are ordinary citizens. We are powerless.

Bravo to the journalist with the guts to write all over the chess board. Bravo to the journalist with the guts to put the well-being of future generations above their glamorous images and comfortable salaries.

When is the last time you heard a "Doctor without Borders" being hailed as hero? Didn't think so. By our media standards, you never will. The true heroes are hidden in the shadows of famine, disease and desperate longing. They make the only difference.

Bless you.

KN

25 January 2002

David:

I have been avidly following the John Walker Lindh case, abhorred by the venom with which the government, the media, and the US population in general has been attacking him and his family, and have written a few times to editorialists whose comments either irked me or which I supported. Your editorial today is the best I have read so far, and I will be curious to know what kind of response you get to it. I think it is a true test of our national character how quickly we are prepared to demonize during these stressful times, and so far the evidence demonstrates an inability of the nation to appreciate the complexities, and subtleties of what is happening in Afghanistan and in the war against terror.

Your editorial was excellent because (a) I learned some things that have not been covered elsewhere (the DOJ's violations of federal criminal procedure) and (b) your ability to point out the paradox between the government's conspiracy theory and its own culpability.

My own reading of this case is that public opinion, up to now mainly seeing Walker Lindh as a terrible criminal, will begin to see him in a more accurate light, that of a young man who chose the wrong cult at the wrong time. I hope you keep writing on the subject, because you seem to have grasped and articulated the case better than anyone else in the media.

Gratefully,

CB

25 January 2002

Dear Editor,

I am encouraged by your bravery in calling a spade a spade. The world lost the truth in this war. The American media became the mouthpiece of the US government. The new Bush legislations are all directed at the denial of human rights to anyone who dares voice opposition to Bush.

What a shame on America. It is America which will lose its valuable values. I am very sad as I love America the old before Bush became a president.

Regards,

B

25 January 2002

Your recent article is a helpful reminder of the bellicose nature of the current political regime. I might also add that the right-wing movement has been very selective in enforcing laws and meting out punishments depending on the political symbolism involved. John Walker Lindh is a young person from Marin County, a place strongly aligned with affluent liberalism intermixed within the Bay Area's communities of working-class and '60s activist liberal democratic traditions. The media has harped on how his "secular humanist" upbringing created his descent into the depths of darkness or whatever.

Clearly the opportunity is not lost on Attorney General Ashcroft to make a political example of Mr. Walker-Lindh as the conservative movement has been using a "take no prisoners" approach aimed at squelching centrist consensus-based political tendencies, currently, the main threat to their narrow political base. I notice when abortion clinics are bombed and anthrax-laced letters are mailed to Democratic politicians, the FBI/Justice Department/media can't seem to make any headway on defining, more less locating, the perpetrators and expose the right-wing organizations and individuals who commit such crimes.

These geographically based attacks certainly accentuate the polarization of this country into the coastal urban centers and the hinterland similar to the red/blue state/national voting maps analyzed after the installation of the current President. Again, the conservative movement continues to polarize Americans on cultural values, regional differences in this case, and foment dislike and distrust with obvious tragic consequences. BT

San Diego

26 January 2002

Kudos to the editor and this print for allowing the truth to be told regarding the extremist attitudes reflected by the Bush administration. There is reason behind every political movement or action, and the events in Afghanistan are no different. Oil has been, and will continue to be, the catalyst for empiricism. Without relent, continue to print what is just for those of us in the pursuit of truth.

DD

26 January 2002

Just wanted you to know that I very much liked your article on Walker. Wish more people used their minds—and their hearts—the way you do. Keep it on.

NB

27 January 2002

George W. Bush is using the office of the Presidency of the United States for personal gain, and people have died as a result.

Halliburton Oil's central Asian pipeline was finished (except for its Afghan segment) by last March, at which time George W. Bush began sending US troops to countries bordering Afghanistan. Halliburton Oil (Vice President Cheney's former company) and the Carlyle Group (which occasionally employs both Presidents Bush) would have benefited greatly from an oil pipeline across Afghanistan.

By July a sizable number of American troops were in place around Afghanistan, and George W. Bush offered the Taliban "a carpet of bombs or a carpet of gold" in order to obtain a right-of-way for the pipeline. As an act of good faith, Bush then issued document number 199i WF213589, which ordered the FBI and other governmental agencies to drop investigations into the bin Ladens, the Taliban and al Qaeda. Agents were ordered to stop their investigations or face punishment. By that time (last July) Bush had already given the Taliban about 143 million dollars of US taxpayer money to show he was serious about his oil deal, so he fully expected them to choose gold over bombs. But they didn't. They chose bombs, and they bombed first.

The attacks on September 11 were the result of a Bush/Cheney oil deal gone bad. And this wasn't an oil deal on behalf of the American people.

As you may recall, Bush allowed his oil friends to artificially inflate US gasoline prices as soon as he was installed in the White House. The price of gas rose to nearly DOUBLE what it had been before his inauguration. And since Bush chose the interests of the oil companies over the interests of the American consumer once before, there is no reason to believe he was conducting negotiations with the Taliban for OUR benefit. No, this is a case of George W. Bush using the power of his office for personal financial gain.

Let me repeat that—George W. Bush attempted to use his office for personal gain, and thousands have died as a result. There has been no greater act of treason in American history. What are we going to do about it?

WW

Washington, DC

29 January 2002



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