

A call to "burn out" the Palestinians: more filth from the Wall Street Journal

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There are certain articles that find their way into the American media that deserve to be noted simply for what they reveal about the character of the American ruling elite. Something extremely rotten is festering in the summit of American society. More and more a fascistic tendency is rearing its ugly head, particularly on the editorial pages of the *Wall Street Journal*.

Such is the case with a commentary written by Reuel Marc Gerecht and published in the *Journal* April 8, entitled "They live to die." The essence of the article is fairly simple: the suicide bombings carried out in Israel by Palestinians stem from an incurable religious fanaticism with which it is impossible to negotiate. This fanaticism (Gerecht uses the Arabic term *istishhad*, or martyrdom) can only be "burned out" of the Palestinians by "carnage," that is, by war and mass killings. The article is a political justification for an all-out assault on the Palestinian population—foreign policy by means of expulsion and extermination. Change a few words and one has a document strikingly reminiscent of Nazi propaganda.

Gerecht starts from the assumption that the fault for the current violence in the Middle East lies entirely with the Palestinians. Israel's actions are wholly justified as an appropriate response to suicide bombings. At one point he denounces the Bush administration, and particularly the State Department (that is, Colin Powell), for even admitting the obvious truth that "Israel's military response to terrorism actually provokes further terrorism." The real cause for the current crisis in the Middle East—the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian population by Israel and its backers in Washington—is swept aside and ignored.

This paves the way for Gerecht to construct an explanation for the violence based on religious and psychological proclivities of Muslim people.

"Martyrdom—*istishhad*—is an old and esteemed idea in Islam." This martyrdom concept has created men who have "eagerly slaughtered themselves" in the name of religion. This religious sensibility must be taken into account, or else "American policy in the region will run aground on secular illusions."

The point of this line of reasoning is to create a civilizational antagonism between the Arab world and the "West" that can not be resolved by rational means. "The idea of jihad against Israel has extraordinary appeal even to secularized Muslims, who can feel the shame of Islam's long slide from glory and superiority over the West as acutely as any practicing Muslim." This is a mode of thinking that has become more and more popular within American intellectual and political circles, ever since Samuel Huntington first set them out systematically in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*.

In this clash, the Palestinians are clearly considered a lesser race. They are irrational, with a youth "not at all conversant with traditional ethics." Gerecht paints a picture of a rational and modern West, in which he includes Israel, confronted with opponents consumed by blind hatred. The Bush administration is therefore wrong "to believe that there is some rational switch inside the Palestinian national movement, which has now elevated holy-war kamikazes to iconic status, that if flipped would make it a committed convert to the sober Western gradualism inherent in the Tenet, Mitchell, and Oslo peace plans." On the contrary, the "engagement" policy of Powell and the like "is premised on a political culture among the Palestinians which simply does not exist."

So what should be the response of "civilization" to this assault? Here Gerecht's barbarism comes out most clearly. "An Iranian parallel is illuminating," he writes. "By late 1987, the carnage of the Iran-Iraq war had

burned out the martyrdom syndrome among young Iranian men.... It is only war—not the well-intended but meaningless Tenet and Mitchell plans—that can now burn out *istishhad* among the Palestinians.... If the administration tries to ‘negotiate’ with this syndrome, it will only fuel the fire and make America, not just Israel, look weak.”

The Iran-Iraq war was instigated by the US, which encouraged Saddam Hussein to invade Iran after the revolution led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The US supplied military intelligence to Iraq, and later provided weapons to Iran, in an effort to extend the mutual slaughter of Iraqi and Iranian youth for as long as possible. At the most critical moments in the war, the Iraqi military used chemical weapons to beat back suicidal assaults by Iranian volunteers, mainly youth.

The right-wing propagandist thus has it both ways: the same event, the mass killing of Iranian youth, is praised as a model for the treatment of the Palestinians, and cited as a crime of Saddam Hussein’s which justifies the US policy of targeting Iraq for military assault because of the alleged danger of “weapons of mass destruction.”

Gerecht is an establishment figure, a frequent contributor to the *New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs* and other publications, in addition to the *Wall Street Journal*. He has been featured on NPR, CNN and other radio and television stations as an expert on Middle Eastern affairs. Currently, he is a fellow at the prominent right-wing American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and for over a decade he served as a Middle Eastern specialist for the Central Intelligence Agency. In 2001 he became the director of the Middle Eastern Initiative at the Project for a New American Century, a right-wing cabal that includes Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick Cheney, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Bush’s new special envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad.

Over the past decade he has consistently voiced the orientation of this extremely militaristic and reckless section of the American ruling class. He was one of the early champions of the Northern Alliance, the tribal grouping that the American government relied on for much of its campaign in Afghanistan. He has called for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein as well as the Islamic fundamentalist government in Iran. In 1998, he advocated a policy of assassination, writing, “In the

war against terrorism—against those who are killing Americans—the U.S. must be willing to kill terrorist chiefs.”

The Bush administration has wholly embraced these policies. More and more, the United States seeks to dominate the world by direct military control, by brute force, by new and more barbaric forms of colonialism. Gerecht and his co-thinkers are developing the political ideology, steeped in racism and chauvinism, to justify such methods.



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