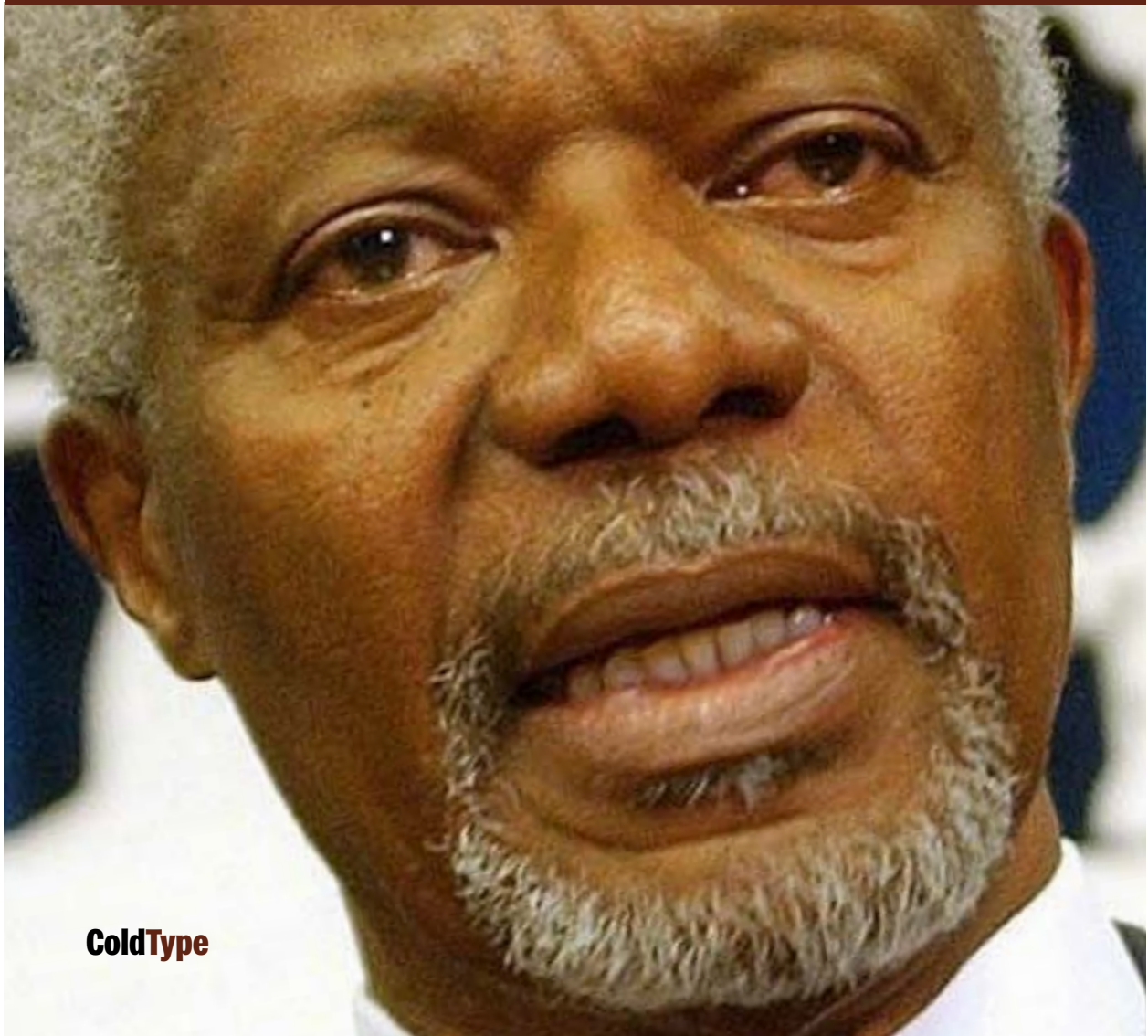


KOFI ANNAN AND THE ART OF PUPPETRY



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IT MAY SOUND ABSURD to suggest any element of puppetry in the role of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. After all, hasn't he been assailed over the past year for corruption and for suggesting that the invasion of Iraq was illegal, and haven't rightwing Republicans and pundits repeatedly called for his ouster? But Kofi Annan has retained his post for eight tumultuous years, through the late Clinton era and the first term and more of George Bush, years in which U.S. officials have not hesitated to push out UN officials they found objectionable (notably, former High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons head Jose Bustani, and most recently Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan M. Cherif Bassiouni). Annan couldn't have kept his high office if he hadn't performed to the satisfaction of those officials. The rightwing outcry against Kofi Annan reflects the extremism of that faction, hostile to the UN and attacking Annan as part of an assault on the UN which they would like to see terminated altogether. The attacks may also serve to keep Annan more closely attuned to U.S. demands by focusing his mind on the threat of a forced exit.

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Puppetry is a relative matter. Some U.S. puppets are placed in power by U.S. arms and require continuous protection, and for this reason are highly responsive to the demands of their protectors. But even in this case, as with Hamid Karzai in Kabul, the puppet will sometimes cry out as Karzai has done with the recent publicity regarding the torture-killings of several Afghans by U.S. soldier-interrogators. The U.S. puppet leaders of the Saigon government, Generals Ky and Thieu, were entirely dependent on U.S. arms for their rule, but they stole, dealt in drugs, and made numerous remarks inconvenient to their string-pullers ("Hitler is my hero" – General Ky), and were openly annoyed at the lack of respect shown them by U.S. leaders. Even highly dependent puppets have some limited freedom of action, especially verbal and theft, but they cannot depart from the demands of the puppeteer on major issues and policy.

A great many U.S. puppets have been remarkably corrupt as well as extremely brutal, as the search for "leaders" who would sell out their country to a foreign power and provide the requisite "favorable climate of investment" has necessitated the resort to folks like Somoza – a "son-of-a-bitch, but our son-of-a-bitch," in Franklin D. Roosevelt's graphic language – Trujillo, Suharto, Pinochet, Marcos, Mobutu, and the generals in Argentina, Brazil, and Saigon. My first collaborative effort with Noam Chomsky was in an article on the Saigon corruption crisis, subtitled "The Search for an Honest Quisling." Honest quislings are hard to come by. The U.S. failure to come up with honest quislings led some commentators to explain their frequent dishonesty in terms of "Asian" (or Latin, or African) "human nature," an explanation bypassing the awkward fact of the selectivity in the search for amenable leaders. In any case, our puppets have very often been crooks, whose robbery has been an acceptable price for general serviceability.

Israel presents an interesting case where the huge aid and military and diplomatic protection provided by the United States would seem to establish a puppet-puppeteer relationship, but where the dependent exhibits considerable freedom of action and sometimes seems able to influence or paralyze puppeteer policy in accord with the puppet's perceived interests. There is an ongoing debate on the left and elsewhere as to whether this is so, and whether

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the power of the Zionist lobby can shape U.S. policy in ways deviating from U.S.-interested policy choices. Ariel Sharon apparently thinks so: Israeli Army Radio quoted him at a September 2001 session of the Israeli cabinet, after his foreign minister, Shimon Peres, warned that "refusing to heed incessant American requests for a cease-fire with the Palestinians would endanger Israeli interests and turn the U.S. against us," responding angrily: "I want to tell you something very clear, don't worry about American pressure on Israel. We will not pay with the blood of our people for American interests and they understand it." Certainly Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Rodham Clinton understand this, as indicated by their unlimited groveling at the latest gathering of the AIPAC.

Kofi Annan is a model puppet, because he is not crudely subservient, but instead combines verbal proclamations of benevolent and progressive aims and policy with virtually complete accommodation to the demands of the United States and its close allies. He will sometimes object in measured language to U.S. violations of law and inhumane and outrageous actions, but he won't resign over them, however egregious and contrary to fundamental principles, and he quickly adjusts to power realities. This gives him the image of decency and allows the UN itself to appear independent and moral even as it literally participates in illegal and immoral actions.

Annan took office in January 1997, in the aftermath of his support of U.S. policy demands in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He had been one of Boutros Boutros-Ghali's subordinates, and in his boss's absence Annan took it upon himself to approve Operation Deliberate Force, the U.S. bombing of Bosnian-Serb targets in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of August, 1995. In *To End A War*, Richard Holbrooke's memoir of the time he spent representing the Clinton administration as its chief negotiator with the warring parties in the former Yugoslavia, Holbrooke asserts that this action assured Kofi Annan's future as a UN leader (p. 103):

When [Operation Deliberate Force] was all over and we could assess

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who had been most helpful, my Washington colleagues usually singled out Kofi Annan at the United Nations, and Willy Claes and General Joulwan at NATO. Annan's gutsy performance in those twenty-four hours was to play a central role in Washington's strong support for him a year later as the successor to Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Secretary-General of the United Nations. Indeed, in a sense Annan won the job that day.

Some 16 months after Annan's approval of the U.S. bombing of Bosnian Serb positions he replaced Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whose reelection was blocked by the United States. Kofi Annan didn't disappoint Holbrooke and his associates. Throughout the Yugoslav struggle and up to the present he has followed the U.S.-NATO party line on the issues there, according to which everything wrong has been attributable to the Serbs. He therefore accepted the unrestrained use of the Yugoslav Tribunal to servicing U.S.-NATO war aims, the refusal to negotiate a settlement of the Kosovo crisis, and the NATO attack on Yugoslavia, which was in violation of the UN Charter. In his report on the Srebrenica massacre (*The Fall of Srebrenica (A/54/549)*, November, 1999), Annan states that in both Bosnia and Kosovo "the international community tried to reach a negotiated settlement with an unscrupulous and murderous regime. In both instances it required the use of force to bring a halt to the planned and systematic killing and expulsion of civilians." This is blatant disinformation, as it is well established that the United States sabotaged the 1992 Lisbon Accord, which had been accepted by the Serbs in Bosnia, that the "planned" expulsion of civilians ("Operation Horseshoe") was a propaganda fraud, and that the Clinton administration deliberately "raised the bar" in the Rambouillet talks of 1999 so as to assure the failure of negotiations over Kosovo, because the Serbs needed a little bombing. These lies helped sustain Annan's support for the 1999 bombing war, which was as clear a violation of the UN Charter as Bush's March 2003 invasion of Iraq.

As a logical follow-up, in February 2004 Annan appointed Louise Arbour as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Arbour, who had been vetted by

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Madeleine Albright for the prosecutor's job for the Yugoslav Tribunal, served in that function before and during the NATO 78-day bombing war, where she played a special role in using a purported judicial body to facilitate a major UN Charter violation and the commission of serious war crimes (see Christopher Black and Edward Herman, "[An Unindicted War Criminal: Louise Arbour and the International Crimes Tribunal](#)," Christopher Black and Edward S. Herman, *Z Magazine*, February 2000; Michael Mandel, *How America Gets Away With Murder*, chaps. 4-6, Pluto Press, 2004). Arbour is now busily engaged in trying to liquidate the UN Human Rights Commission that she heads, with Annan's support, because the United States does not like its mode of operation and failure to do the U.S. bidding. (Her role here may be similar to that which John Bolton will likely play in the UN itself.) Arbour, whose service to NATO as Tribunal prosecutor was the ultimate in politicization, wants to make these changes because the Commission is "politicized." Translated, it has been serving the wrong interests. (On liquidating the UN Human Rights Commission, see *The OHCHR Plan of Action: Protection and Empowerment*, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, May, 2005.)

Kofi Annan played an ugly role in the Bush ouster of the democratically-elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide from Haiti. As reported by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, "In the days preceding the February 29, 2004 *de facto* ouster of Aristide and his U.S. arranged flight into exile, Annan echoed U.S. policy in condemning Aristide as Haiti's 'failed' president and Powell's cynical scenario that international peacekeepers would be sent to Haiti, but only if Aristide abrogated most of his constitutionally mandated authority. Annan's backing of Powell's strategy legitimated Washington's goal of ridding itself of Aristide. At today's talks, a politically weakened Annan is likely to discuss next year's Haiti elections and how to minimize a role for the pro-Aristide Lavalas party." (Seth DeLong, Council on Hemispheric Affairs, "[Aiding Oppression in Haiti: Kofi Annan and General Heleno's Complicity in Latorture's Jackal Regime](#)," Dec. 16, 2004.) As the situation has deteriorated further and the Jackal Regime continues to brutalize and kill, the UN mission and Annan have done nothing constructive (see Marcela Valente, "[Haiti: Human Rights Delegation](#)

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[Echoes Growing Criticism of UN Mission](#)," Inter Press Service News Agency, April 8, 2005).

In dealing with the struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, Kofi Annan has bent over backwards to accommodate the United States and Israel. Although Israel is in violation of dozens of UN resolutions, has violated them seriously for years and does so now on a daily basis, Annan does not press for enforcement. When Israel refused to allow a UN on-site study of the attack on Jenin, he accepted this meekly, in marked contrast with his aggressive pursuit of enforcement of rulings against Serbia in the conflicts in that area. Even his language tilts in a one-sided way, as he is indignant over suicide bombings, which he regularly "strongly condemns" but only expresses regrets or "grave concern" at Israeli violence (for illustrations and discussion of this double standard, see David Peterson, "[Principals of World Order II](#)," ZNet Blogs, Oct. 5, 2004).

As regards Iraq, Annan remained silent from the time of his taking office in 1997 on the "[sanctions of mass destruction](#)" imposed by the UN on Iraq (essentially, by the United States and Britain), and the systematic and illegal bombing of Iraq by the U.S.-British axis of preemptive violence. His performance as the United States was setting the stage to invade Iraq was enlightening as to his mode of operation. He tried to channel the United States and Britain into accepting the inspections regime and into agreement to abide by a Security Council majority judgment. When this failed, he did say that an invasion was in violation of the UN Charter, but he didn't do this with the passion that he has expressed on Palestinian suicide bombers, and in fact he couldn't even say it in straightforward language: his March 10, 2003 statement was that an invasion "would not be in conformity with the Charter." (For his complete statement, see "[Netherlands – Secretary General's press conference \[unofficial transcript\]](#)," UN News Center, March 10, 2003.)

And with the invasion, he didn't resign at his failure to prevent a very major violation of the UN Charter and the carrying out of the "supreme crime." Subsequently, he accepted the occupation and helped legitimize it, supporting

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the resolutions (including [Res. 1546](#) of June 8, 2004) that gave the United States and its coalition of aggressors UN Security Council sanction to stay, pacify, and rule as long as deemed necessary (in contrast with the UN's clear insistence in 1990-91 that the aggressor Iraq get out of the invaded and occupied Kuwait and pay damages for its attack). The murderous assault on Fallujah was never once officially condemned by Annan, whose mealy-mouthed remarks on the subject featured the threat such an assault would pose to the forthcoming elections, and that "The threat or actual use of force not only risks deepening the sense of alienation of certain communities, but would also reinforce perceptions among the Iraqi population of a continued military occupation" (Maggie Farley, "[U.N.'s Annan Seeks to Prevent an Assault on Fallouja](#)," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 5, 2004). Gosh, we wouldn't want the Iraqis to think they are an occupied country!

He has not assailed the open U.S. threat to commit armed aggression against Iran, Syria and North Korea, and it is likely that if and when these occur he will quietly say that they are "not in conformity" with the UN Charter, before helping to ram through a Security Council recognition of the aggression-occupation "facts on the ground."

Kofi Annan has come up with a series of reforms of the UN designed to make it more useful to education, development, poverty alleviation, and the conquest of disease, and suggesting political changes to better enable it to deal with terrorism and war ([In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security, and Human Rights for All](#), Report of the Secretary-General, March 2005). Unfortunately, his proposals and fence straddling are ultimately unconvincing and unlikely to accomplish anything useful, for two main reasons: First because it is the United States and its allies whose funding and resources are needed for development and humanitarian issues, and the United States is moving away from bolstering UN finances and cooperating with the UN on anything the Bush administration does not positively favor. Second, the main global problem of war- and terrorism-prevention is the inability of the "international community" to constrain the United States itself, which in the past half dozen years has carried out three major illegal aggressions in violation of the UN

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Charter. Kofi Annan's reform proposals ([par. 169-170](#)), which still rely heavily on Security Council action, do not even suggest removing the veto from the initial five permanent members, hence will do nothing even formally to prevent a U.S. veto from stalemating any Security Council action impeding its war-making and aggressions. Annan's reforms won't be implemented and won't work anyway, but this rests ultimately on the absence thus far of any serious international community resistance to a superpower out of control and posing a global threat at many levels and in many spheres.

In the fall of 2004, Kofi Annan was invited to Richard Holbrooke's apartment in New York City to meet with a number of U.S. power brokers to hear what they had to say about the need for reform at the UN (Warren Hoge, ["Secret Meeting, Clear Mission: 'Rescue' U.N.,"](#) *New York Times*, Jan. 3, 2005). Annan reportedly listened and said nothing at the meeting. "In the week after the session, Mr. Annan sought and obtained a meeting with Condoleezza Rice, the nominee for secretary of state. United Nations officials said afterward that it was an encouraging meeting." The Bolton appointment followed soon after this encouraging meeting, so any moves toward a "larger freedom" through the work of the UN seems unlikely. In fact, we may soon see a further test of Annan's willingness to serve in the interest of a "shrinking freedom" and more preventive warfare.

NOTES

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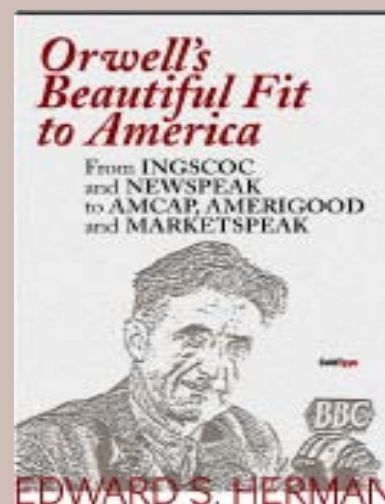
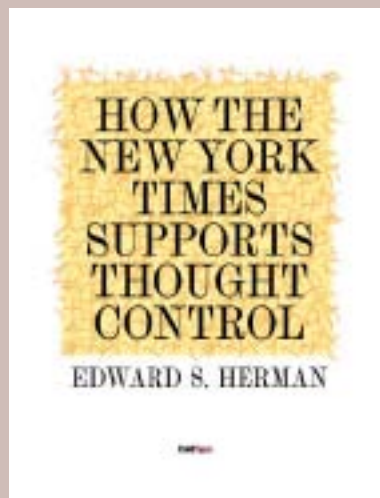
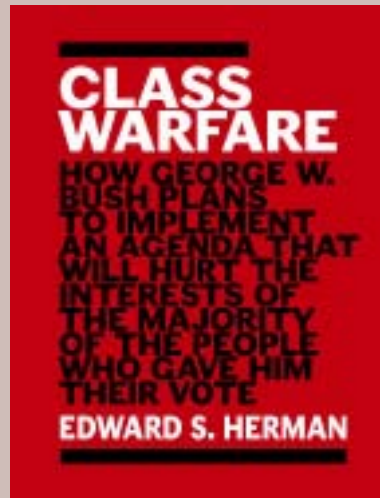
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