

FEBRUARY 28

Mahatma Bush

Evidently the president's trip to India created an option too perfect to pass up: The man who has led the world in violence during the first years of the 21st century could pay homage to the world's leading practitioner of nonviolence during the first half of the 20th century. So the White House announced plans for George W. Bush to lay a wreath at the Mahatma Gandhi memorial in New Delhi this week.

While audacious in its shameless and extreme hypocrisy, this PR gambit is in character for the world's only superpower. One of the main purposes of the Bush regime's media spin is to depict reality as its opposite. And Karl Rove obviously figured that mainstream U.S. media outlets, with few exceptions, wouldn't react with anywhere near the appropriate levels of derision or outrage.

Presidential rhetoric aside, Gandhi's enthusiasm for nonviolence is nearly matched by Bush's enthusiasm for violence. The commander in chief regularly proclaims his misty-eyed pride in U.S. military actions that destroy countless human lives with massive and continual techno-violence. But the Bushian isn't quite 180 degrees from the Gandhian. The president of the United States is not exactly committed to violence; what he wants is an end to resistance.

"A conqueror is always a lover of peace," the Prussian general Karl von Clausewitz observed. Yearning for Uncle Sam to fulfill his increasingly farfetched promise of victory in Iraq, the U.S. president is an evangelist for peace – on his terms.

Almost two years ago, in early April 2004, the icy cerebral pundit George Will engaged in a burst of candor when he wrote a column about the widening bloodshed inside Iraq: "In the war against the militias, every door American troops crash through, every civilian bystander shot – there will be many – will make matters worse, for a while. Nevertheless, the first task of the occupation remains the first task of government: to establish a monopoly on violence."

The column – headlined "A War President's Job" in the Washington Post – diagnosed the problem and prescribed more violence. Lots more: "Now Americans must steel themselves for administering the violence necessary to disarm or defeat Iraq's urban militias,

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which replicate the problem of modern terrorism – violence that has slipped the leash of states." For unleashing the Pentagon's violence, the rationales are inexhaustible.

In an important sense, it's plausible to envision Bush as a lover of peace and even an apostle of nonviolence – but, in context, those sterling invocations of virtues are plated with sadism in the service of empire. The president of the United States is urging "peace" as a synonym for getting his way in Iraq. From Washington, the most exalted vision of peace is a scenario where the occupied no longer resist the American occupiers or their allies.

The world has seen many such leaders, eager to unleash as much violence as necessary to get what they want, and glad to praise nonviolence whenever convenient. But no photo-op can change the current reality that the world's most powerful government is also, by far, the most violent and the most dangerous.

Norman Solomon's latest book is "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." For information, go to: www.WarMadeEasy.com