

TORTURE

ASIAN AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

JUNE 2015 VOLUME 04 NUMBER 01 & 02

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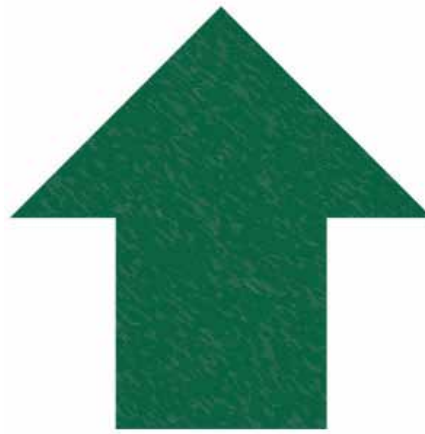
THE LOST CAUSE

*Impunity of torture despite anti-torture legislation
In the Philippines*

THE MURDERER AS HERO

THE preponderance of torturers and killers that make up the modern day heroes imposed upon the populace is appalling. Equally appalling is the willingness with which so many of us accept the definition of these questionable characters as heroic. From Chris Kyle of American Sniper infamy to the fictional characters in the US television crime series NCIS, the common denominator is the characters' self-righteous sense that they are somehow better than those whom they beat and kill. The fact is that they are not. Murderers are murderers no matter who they kill for.

I have not seen American Sniper and have no intention of doing so. The book was a difficult and repulsive read all by itself. Actually seeing reenactments of the murders described and hearing the nationalistic and racist dialogue onscreen is more than I want to deal with. However, I do watch NCIS. After each episode I view I ask myself why I watch it. The national security rationale that is the foundation of the show and the



ARROW ON
THE DOORPOST

Ron Jacobs

forays into propaganda for the US Marine Corps, National Security Agency and the entire US warfare state is against everything I believe in. Yet, the apparent integrity of the primary characters and their interpersonal relationships keep me coming back for the next episode.

I recently read an article in the conservative weekly of the Catholic Church in the United States, the National Catholic Register. The article is titled "Catholic, Christian and Killing for a Living" and is essentially an interview with retired Marine sniper Jack Coughlin, who

intentionally killed dozens of people in US military war zones during his military career. Without any sense of irony, Coughlin is described in the article as "pro-life." He also justifies the murders he undertook in the name of fighting "evil." Of course, left unsaid is that many of the fighters and other people he and his fellow snipers kill also believe they are fighting "evil."

Jethro Gibbs, the head agent on the NCIS team (played by Mark Harmon), is also a former Marine

sniper. Although he is rarely bothered by the memories of the murders he committed (nor by the killings he and his team carry out in every episode), his justification is usually of a more personal nature. Indeed, the defining murder he committed as a sniper was the killing of a drug trafficker that murdered his first wife and daughter. If any killing haunts him it is this one. Yet, this does not stop him from killing again. Likewise, any qualms felt by the individuals employed as snipers in today's military are apparently not enough to change any aspect of the military's use of these killers.

Instead, what the civilian sees is greater and greater justification for the killing that comes with war; and greater and greater equating of murder with heroic action. The war in Iraq, which the Catholic Church did not think met its just war doctrine, nevertheless employed Catholic snipers, pilots and other military-approved killers, not to mention torturers, all of whom live today with relatively clear consciences. Why? Because their religion (like virtually every other) provides them with enough theological loopholes to continue living without examining the nature of their deeds.

Then, there are the politicians. Here in the United States the interminable election season has begun. Politicians from both parties are gathering supporters, building campaign bank accounts, hiring writers and advertising companies. They redesign their public personas and redefine their political positions depending on what their advisors tell them the polls are saying. As I write, the media is full of potential presidents explaining their positions on the 2003 Iraq invasion and the succeeding occupation. All of

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this is occurring while the somewhat contrived phenomenon known as the Islamic State claims to have taken another Iraqi city. The brother of former president George W. Bush claims that it was faulty intelligence that caused his sibling's administration to go to war in Iraq. Most of the other Republican candidates agree. Of course, this is nonsense. As anyone who was cognisant in 2002 remembers, the intelligence wasn't faulty. It said there were no active WMD. It was the determination of the neocon wing of the US ruling class that denied that intelligence, made up their own, and sent the US military off. The Democrats followed willingly. Even those who voted against the original authorisation for war, like candidate Bernie Sanders, voted to fund it afterwards.

From Baghdad to Ramadi, Al-Ghraiab to Mosul, and all points between and around, a fair amount of the onus for this war resides with those politicians and with the citizens who voted for them again and again. The torturers in US-run prisons, the civil war fomented by US intelligence, the massive civilian casualties—all of this is their responsibility. So is the current situation in that country, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Middle East and South Asia. So are groups like Islamic State, which, according to recent reports in various Israeli media, is actually coordinating some of its attacks in Syria with Tel Aviv. At the same time, recent press releases from the US Pentagon have informed the world that the United States has Special Forces troops operating in Syria. In other words, there are ground troops in Syria.

The incredible popularity of films like American Sniper prove, if nothing else, that the willingness

to continue this imperial path of foolish and deadly destruction has plenty of support among those in the imperial nation. Whatever the reasons beyond those that serve the war industry and its benefactors, the brutality, senselessness, and plain old death of war is spreading, not shrinking.

As for those other reasons, what could they be? Why are mass murderers in the uniform of supposedly civilised nations (like the US) celebrated while those, like Chelsea Manning who expose their crimes, are imprisoned or ignored? What is it in the populations of these countries that invokes their support for actions they would find reprehensible if they were being perpetrated on their children and homes? Why do they celebrate the men who commit such acts? In 1967 Norman Mailer released a novel titled *Why Are We In Vietnam?* This exercise by Mailer is the story of a couple 18 year-old Texans off on a hunting trip with their wealthy fathers. The quartet are consumed with an overload of braggadocio and testosterone. The story of the trip, which is full of whisky and tales of past sexual conquests, racial slurs and assumptions of American exceptionalism, is told through the eyes of one of the younger men. It is obviously meant as a psychological metaphor for why the US fought in Vietnam. Like the film *The Deer Hunter* and a number of other films having to do with killing America's enemies, the nature of US machismo and its curious confusion with racism and homophobia, *Why Are We In Vietnam?* puts forth the proposition that not only is the rugged individualism of the white-skinned pioneer essential to the myth of the US conquest of the North America continent, it is also essential to the expansion of US capitalism as well. Indeed, it is part and parcel of why US history has more years of slaughter than it does years of peace. ■

Ron Jacobs is the author of a series of crime novels and The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground. His new book is titled Daydream Sunset: 60s Counterculture in the '70s.

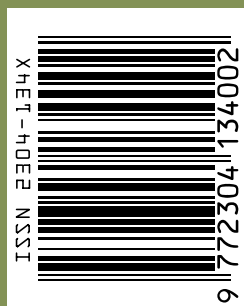
CHAPTER VII 35. (1)
While any person holds office as President, no proceedings shall be instituted or continued against him in any court or tribunal in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by him either in his official or private capacity.
(THE CONSTITUTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA)



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and it should be abolished

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