

LETTERS

REDEFINING GENEVA

In another blatant example of the Bush regime's utter disregard for truth, White House spokesman Tony Snow said a few days after the Supreme Court ruling that "the instruction manuals used by the Department of Defense already comply with the humane treatment provisions of Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions." (Associated Press, 7/11/06) Many people know about the infamous memo from Alberto Gonzales to George Bush in January 2002.

At the time the White House counsel, Gonzales argued in that memo that the global situation requires "a new kind of war" and that ignoring international law would enable the US president to "preserve his flexibility." Gonzales ended by saying, "In my judgment, this new paradigm renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders quaint some of its provisions."

A Reader, New York

HIZBULLAH, HAMAS, SYRIA, AND IRAN

The situation in the Middle East includes brutally repressive, reactionary regimes—and forces aligned with them—who are opposed for their own reasons to the US and Israel, but who do not represent genuine liberation struggles. The forces described here fit into that category.

Hizbullah (which means Party of God) is a Shi'ite Islamist fundamentalist party and military organization in Lebanon that seeks an Islamic republic modeled after Iran. Its leader is Sheik Hassan Nasrallah. Hizbullah fought the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon from 1982 to 2000, when Israel was forced to withdraw. It is the main Shi'ite political party in Lebanon and receives support from both Iran and Syria.

Syria had a large military presence in Lebanon until 2005 when it was accused of involvement in the assassination of the Lebanese prime minister. Protests forced the Syrian army to withdraw from Lebanon, in what is known as the "Cedar Revolution." The new Lebanese government was hailed by the United States as an example for the region. Hiz-bullah holds seats in the Lebanese parliament and has several cabinet positions, but it is not the main force in the Lebanese government. In fact many of the forces in the Lebanese government don't like Hizbullah, because it receives support from Syria. The Hizbullah militia does control much of the territory in southern Lebanon, which the central Lebanese government is too weak to control.

Hizbullah is part of an Islamist movement that seeks to establish its version of Islam as the ruling ideology and reshaping power relations throughout the Middle East. This agenda has often put this movement at sharp odds with the US and Israel.

In 2005, Hamas was elected to run the Palestinian Authority. Since the late 1980s Israel has at times promoted the growth of this Islamic fundamentalist group as a way

of undercutting secular forces and to stoke clashes among Palestinian groups. Hamas, with its reactionary ideology, is in some ways a perfect foil for the US and Israel, who would like to make the terms of the conflict modern democracies vs obscurantist theocracy.

RCP, USA

GONE TOO FAR?

Not long ago, a provocative (but virtually unreported) confrontation took place between Noam Chomsky and a “tough” audience of elite professors and graduate students at one of America’s larger East Coast universities.

They had come to hear the man whom Britain’s *The Guardian* ranked “with Marx, Shakespeare, and the Bible as one of the ten most quoted sources in the humanities.” The man whom even *The New York Times* admitted to be “arguably the most important intellectual alive today” and “perhaps the most widely read voice on foreign policy on the planet” (but whose views apparently so discomfited NY Times management that it blanked him out of the paper for decades, and refused until recently even to review his books).

What Chomsky told his audience - with biting wit and often wickedly funny ironies - challenged much of what passes for “common wisdom” today, and offered startling new perspectives on the lies of Bush-Cheney, 9/11, the Iraqi war, terrorism, oil, the peace movement, the Patriot Act, corporate greed, and government corruption.

But some of Chomsky’s “new perspectives” have so affronted prevailing opinion that even his admirers may be wondering if-perhaps this time - Chomsky had gone too far.

FSRN, USA

'NO' TO COMMUNALISM

Bombay, the city that never sleeps, can be said to be a new barometer of the mood of the broad masses of the Indian people.

Gone are the days of the 90s when the city had witnessed communal riots after the demolition of the Babri Mosque. Gone are the days of the *Maha-aratis* and the ‘Behram-padas’ - the many tragic spots in the sprawling city which are a living reminder of the times when the spirit of B’bay was torn asunder by organised forces owning allegiance to fanatic/sectarian ideologies.

It is true that all that is passe. Perhaps it is marker of the changed mood of the city that a man the self-proclaimed commander of his loyal followers, a man who had been indicted by the SriKrishna Commission for his role in the riots in early nineties, is watching helplessly the crumbling of his ‘empire’.

The way people have turned a new leaf was evident once again when the city recently witnessed bomb blasts in local trains. Definitely the people who had planned the inhuman act had expected otherwise. Presumably they were thinking that the bloodletting of the early nineties may return. But were in for a great shock.

It was for everyone to see that, the people in the city, who otherwise are bracketed as the 'rude' ones, saw to it that the spirit of the city lives. One could see long queues of people outside hospitals ready to donate blood, one could see every other guy becoming a faceless good Samaritan, helping the wounded, joining the endless search of people for their near and dear ones. The whole city stood still for a while, led by the President of the Republic, to remember the dead and show to the outside world that it is united in this hour of grief and would not feel provoked by anyone.

S G,
Delhi
