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The U.S. presidential campaign is now in full swing. (In truth, it never actually ends; the savage grasping and grappling among damaged souls seeking their brief season of domination and death-dealing goes on daily without respite.) In the months to come, we will be subjected to an ever-growing, ever-roaring flood of rhetoric about the unique, unquestionable, divinely ordained goodness of America. (And how the "other side" would destroy or demean this precious moral specialness.)

This rhetoric will come both from the radical, society-shaking extremists laughingly called "conservatives" in our fun-house political system, and from the reactionary defenders of elite wealth and murderous militarism laughingly known as "progressives." (And, of course, from the well-fed, milky mannered, comfortably numb burghers known as "centrists.")

All Americans are marianated in this mindset from birth, and it is reinforced in them, every day, by the most powerful and pervasive media machinery in history, by enormous societal pressure, and by the dead heavy weight of tradition. Even the most hardened cynics might feel the stirrings of atavastic response to these siren songs woven into the fabric of the American psyche.

In such cases, I recommend a reading of the following two articles. They will help remind you of the reality being cloaked by the psyche-stirring, button-pushing bullshit of the grasping wretches seeking power.

First, a remarkable piece in the London Review of Books , detailing the personal testimony of a child -- a child -- sold into years of captivity and torture at the hands of the proud, always-to-be-honored defenders of American values. It's the story of Mohammed el Gorani, a Saudi-born teenager from Chad, whose black skin made him a special target for his captors in

the gulag hellholes of Kandahar and Guantanamo.

Blocked from acquiring professional training or higher education by the virulent prejudice in America's stalwart ally, at age 14 el Gorani to Pakistan to learn computer skills and English. Two months into his course, he was grabbed by Pakistani security goons and bundled off to their American masters, eager for warm bodies to fill the new gulag:

They took me to a prison, and they started questioning me about al-Qaida and the Talibans. I had never heard those words. ‘What are you talking about?’ I said. ‘Listen, Americans are going to interrogate you. Just say you’re from al-Qaida, you went with al-Qaida in Afghanistan, and they’ll send you home with some money.’ ... One Pakistani officer was a good guy. He said: ‘The Pakistani government just want to sell you to the Americans.’ ... The Pakistanis took away our chains and gave us handcuffs ‘made in the USA’. I told the other detainees: ‘Look, we’re going to the US!’ I thought the Americans would understand that the Pakistanis had cheated them, and send me back to Saudi.

... When they took off our masks, we were at an airport, with big helicopters. Americans shouted: ‘You’re under arrest, UNDER CUSTODY OF THE US ARMY! DON’T TALK, DON’T MOVE OR WE’LL SHOOT YOU!’ An interpreter was translating into Arabic. Then they started beating us – I couldn’t see with what but something hard. People were bleeding and crying. We had almost passed out when they put us in a helicopter.

We landed at another airstrip. It was night. Americans shouted: ‘Terrorists, criminals, we’re going to kill you!’ Two soldiers took me by my arms and started running. My legs were dragging on the ground. They were laughing, telling me: ‘Fucking nigger!’ I didn’t know what that meant, I learned it later. ... There was an Egyptian (I recognised his Arabic) wearing a US uniform. He started by asking me: ‘When was the last time you saw Osama bin Laden?’ ‘Who?’ He took me by my shirt collar and they beat me again. ...

One day they started moving prisoners again. ‘You guys are going to a place where there is no sun, no moon, no freedom, and you’re going to live there for ever,’ the guards told us, and laughed. ... In the beginning there were interrogations every night. They tortured me with electricity, mostly on the toes. The nails of my big toes fell off. Sometimes they hung you up like a chicken and hit your back. Sometimes they chained you, with your head on the ground. You couldn’t move for 16 or 17 hours. You peed on yourself.’

... Sometimes they showed you the ugly face: torturing, torturing without asking questions. Sometimes I said, ‘Yes, whatever you ask, I’ll say yes,’ because I just wanted torture to stop. But the next day, I said: ‘No, I said yes yesterday because of torture.’ My first or second interrogator said to me: ‘Mohammed, I know you’re innocent but I’m doing my job. I have children to feed. I don’t want to lose my job.’

‘This is no job,’ I said, ‘this is criminal. Sooner or later you’re going to pay for this. Even in afterlife.’

‘I’m a machine – I ask you the questions they told me to ask, I bring them your answers. Whatever they are, I don’t care.’

Mohammed el Gorani spent almost eight years in Guantanamo. His captors knew very early on that he was an innocent child, not a terrorist. The one piece of "evidence" they showed him was a paper "proving" he had been involved with al Qaeda in London -- in 1993, when he had been a six-year-old boy cleaning car windshields in Saudi Arabia. But what did that matter? His captors were "machines": they were just following orders, just doing their jobs -- just like every factotum of every brutal system in history.

Oh, but those are the bad old days, some might say. (Despite the fact that the Guantanamo gulag is still operating, alongside other similar facilities -- known and unknown -- around the world.) Today, we're told, we are lucky to be ruled by a kinder, wiser, more humane leader. Sure, he's not perfect -- who is? And OK, maybe, in the end, he's the lesser of two evils. But certainly any serious, savvy person knows there is a profound, qualitative difference between Barack Obama and his predecessor -- and those who would supplant him. Right?

For those whose partisan atavism -- or nostalgia -- might be stirred by such arguments, I urge you to read this piercing and powerful essay by Arthur Silber. It is one of the best summations of the moral horror that permeates our political system -- and the wretched grasper now in charge of it -- that I've ever seen. Here are a few excerpts, but don't cheat yourself: go read the entire piece:

The killer said :

“Ask Osama bin Laden and the 22 out of 30 top al-Qaeda leaders who’ve been taken off the field whether I engage in appeasement,” the president fired back at an impromptu news conference at the White House.

“Or whoever’s left out there,” he added. “Ask them about that.”

Watch the video at the link provided above. It's instructive, particularly Obama's expression when he adds, "Or whoever's left out there." He speaks of murder, yet the words are breezy and casual: this is a murderer so used to killing that he talks of his past and future victims interchangeably, and in terms of approximation. Just "whoever's left out there." He wants to be sure you know he'll order all of them killed in time. His face is expressionless, the eyes dead. This is a man without a soul in any healthy, positive sense. He murders -- and he's proud of it.

More than a million innocent Iraqis were murdered as the result of the United States' criminal war of aggression on that country. Obama has heralded America's "success" in Iraq as "an extraordinary achievement."

The continuing murders in Pakistan and Afghanistan are so numerous and so regular that they barely merit notice for more than a few days, at least as far as the United States government and most Americans are concerned. Over the recent Thanksgiving weekend, the United States government murdered at least 25 Pakistanis .... On the same weekend: "Six children were among seven civilians killed in a NATO airstrike in southern Afghanistan, Afghan officials said Thursday." The story has already fallen into the well of forgetfulness. It must be the case that incidents like this occur at least once a day given the number of military operations ordered by the Murderer-in-Chief and carried out by those who follow his orders. ...

These are only a few of the stories we know about, and only from a very brief period of time. Countless other murders take place all over the world, and we can only gather the dim outlines of what is occurring. This is not to mention numerous lesser acts of cruelty and violence, many of which will alter lives in searing ways, for all the desolate years to follow.

Consider [this passage from Nick Tu rse]:

... Last year, Karen DeYoung and Greg Jaffe of the Washington Post reported that U.S. Special Operations forces were deployed in 75 countries, up from 60 at the end of the Bush presidency. By the end of this year, U.S. Special Operations Command [SOCOM] spokesman Colonel Tim Nye told me, that number will likely reach 120. "We do a lot of traveling -- a lot more than Afghanistan or Iraq," he said recently. This global presence -- in about 60% of the world's nations and far larger than previously acknowledged -- provides striking new evidence of a rising clandestine Pentagon power elite waging a secret war in all corners of the world.

...In 120 countries across the globe, troops from Special Operations Command carry out their secret war of high-profile assassinations, low-level targeted killings, capture/kidnap operations, kick-down-the-door night raids, joint operations with foreign forces, and training missions with indigenous partners as part of a shadowy conflict unknown to most Americans. Once "special" for being small, lean, outsider outfits, today they are special for their power, access, influence, and aura.

No minimally decent human being would choose to have anything whatsoever to do with a government which systematically engages in acts of this kind. This is true of anyone who is part of the national governing apparatus, or wishes to be. It is most especially true of anyone who wishes to become president.

... [A] reverence for life demands that we see the Death State exactly for what it is -- and walk away to the fullest extent we can. That is not the course Barack Obama chose. He wanted to be, he now is the Murderer-in-Chief. He is proud of his achievement.

Silber concludes with a look back to a post he wrote five years ago -- a piece even more true today, and one which shows the horrific continuity between the "bad old days" and our enlightened, peace-laureled progressive era:

If you have ever wondered how a serial murderer -- a murderer who is sane and fully aware of the acts he has committed -- can remain steadfastly convinced of his own moral superiority and show not even the slightest glimmer of remorse, you should not wonder any longer.

The United States government is such a murderer. It conducts its murders in full view of the entire world. It even boasts of them. Our government, and all our leading commentators, still maintain that the end justifies the means -- and that even the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of innocents is of no moral consequence, provided a sufficient number of people can delude themselves into believing the final result is a "success."

...We can appeal all we want to "American exceptionalism," but any "exceptionalism" that remains ours is that of a mass murderer without a soul, and without a conscience. ... It is useless to appeal to any "American" sense of morality: we have none. It does not matter how immense the pile of corpses grows: we will not surrender or even question our delusion that we are right, and that nothing we do can be profoundly, unforgivably wrong.