

suffered in silence. Post-*Kelo*, their plight has become national news.

That's why Shirey and other advocates for eminent domain are having heartburn. Consider that nothing has yet to be built on the site of the New London neighborhood that was ground zero in the *Kelo* case. No one wants to be remembered as the developer who built on Susette Kelo's house. Chalk it up to the value of stigma.

Even the bond guys are getting nervous. These eminent-domain-using redevelopment projects usually are funded by debt. Those who float the bonds, and the myriad consultants and attorneys involved in this process, have one goal in mind: make the deal happen. That's how they get paid. Anything that gets in the way of the deal is bad.

A Feb. 28 report by Fitch Ratings called "Beyond Kelo: Reactions, Responses, and Credit Quality," explains that "Shortly after the decision, attempts to legislate restrictions to eminent domain powers have begun at both the federal and state levels. If these efforts prove successful and eminent domain powers are restricted to a significant degree, Fitch Ratings believes municipal credit quality could be restrained or negatively affected."

I've seen the effect of the *Kelo* backlash locally. In one open state Senate seat in central Orange County, the issue of eminent domain looms large, as the Republican candidate is one of only two Republican Assembly members statewide who refused to support eminent-domain reform. Both Democrats vying for the seat bucked their party and supported restrictions on eminent domain. Put your money on whichever Democrat wins the primary. In the city of Yorba Linda, California, residents gathered double the number of signatures needed to subject an eminent-domain-using, subsidy-rich downtown redevelopment project to a citywide vote earlier this

year. Officials wisely canceled the plan, understanding that eminent domain would certainly lose at the polls.

In her stinging dissent to *Kelo*, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor predicted, "The fallout from this decision will not be random. The beneficiaries are likely to be those citizens with disproportionate influence and power in the political process, including large corporations and development firms."

Yet nobody predicted the current fallout. That redevelopment officials and developers who abuse eminent domain are upset is a sure sign that the backlash against *Kelo* is starting to hit paydirt. ■

*Steven Greenhut is senior editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and author of Abuse of Power: How the Government Misuses Eminent Domain.*

## Our Allies, the Mullahs

On Iraq, at least, the U.S. and Iran find common ground.

By Gareth Porter

THE AGREEMENT between Washington and Iran to hold direct talks on Iraq has forged a new linkage between the Iraq and Iran crises. Hardliners in the Bush administration are resisting any linkage because they want to avoid pressure for a broader settlement with Iran. But they have already lost the battle against talks with Iran on the stabilization of Iraq. Those negotiations are likely to increase the pressure for bilateral negotiations on Iran's nuclear program and Iranian security concerns.

The convergence of the two issues is being driven both by the need of the United States and Iraqi political factions for Iranian help in resolving the sectarian violence and political deadlock in Iraq and by Iran's desire to reach a broader settlement with Washington.

The U.S. reactions to the Iranian acceptance of talks on Iraq reveal a sharp contrast in the attitudes of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other administration officials toward the talks. Before flying to Australia, Rice said the talks with Iran on Iraq "could be useful."

The following day, however, some administration officials began to denigrate the value of those talks. White House National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley said they were "simply a device by the Iranians to try to divert pressure that they are feeling in New York."

Hadley suggested that there was no need for the United States to talk with Iran at all because, "We're talking to Iran all the time: We make statements, they make statements." The same day, a "senior U.S. official," speaking to reporters while demanding anonymity, called the Iranian offer of talks "a stunt" and said Washington would participate only to avoid "criticisms that it did not do all it can do to defuse bloody tensions in Iraq." And a White House official sought out reporters to say the Iranian offer was "almost puffery."

The attacks by those associated with the administration's hard-line policy toward Iran revealed sharp differences over which is more important—isolating Iran diplomatically or taking advan-

tage of its influence within the Shi'a political leadership in Iraq to help settle the crisis there.

The Dick Cheney-Donald Rumsfeld group, whose views were expressed by Hadley and the anonymous officials minimizing the importance of talks with Iran, clearly care less about what happens in Iraq than they do about maintaining the policy of implicit, if not explicit, regime change in Tehran.

Rice and Khalilzad, however, are apparently willing to risk a weakening or breach of the policy of isolating and threatening Iran because they recognize the desperation of the sectarian-political situation in Iraq and believe Iran could help.

Since late last year, Bush has sided with Rice and Khalilzad against Cheney and Rumsfeld, when they prevailed on Bush to authorize talks with Iran on the Iraq crisis. In late December or early January, Khalilzad dispatched a message to Iranian authorities proposing co-operation on Iraq, according to the London-based Arab-language newspaper *al-Hayat*.

The Cheney-Rumsfeld group did not attack the decision then because they were confident that Iran would reject an invitation for discussions limited solely to Iraq. Iran's foreign minister quickly confirmed that belief by declaring that Iran would not agree to those terms.

Khalilzad has apparently repeated his proposal to Iran to discuss the stabilization of Iraq more recently. According to a March 12 article in the London *Sunday Times* by Lindsey Hilsum, the international editor of London's Channel 4 news, a senior Iranian intelligence official said that the U.S. invitation of talks on Iraq had been "renewed" in late February.

This time, the Iranians did not reject the U.S. proposal. Their willingness to help stabilize the situation in Iraq without any commitment to broader talks reflects the increased perception in

Tehran of a danger of military confrontation with Washington. Since the Iranian rejection of Khalilzad's earlier proposal for talks, the Bush administration has stepped up its pressure on Tehran over the nuclear issue and orchestrated a campaign to take the nuclear issue to the Security Council.

In agreeing to help the United States on Iraq, the Iranians are primarily interested in the possibility of using talks on Iraq as a bridge to broader diplomatic negotiations with Washington. The Iranian intelligence official told Hilsum that Tehran would accept the U.S. offer for talks but wanted them to be in a neutral country, hoping they would eventually lead to a dialogue on the nuclear issue as well.

In announcing Tehran's acceptance of U.S. terms for the talks, Ali Larijani, Iran's chief negotiator on its nuclear program, who is known to be close to the supreme leader of the regime, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, hinted at the desire to reach an accommodation with Washington on nuclear and other issues. "If the Americans stop their troublemaking in the region and if they examine their previous conduct and behavior, a lot of things may happen," he said.

## THE IRANIANS ARE PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN THE POSSIBILITY OF USING TALKS ON IRAQ AS A BRIDGE TO BROADER DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS WITH WASHINGTON.

The hardliners in Washington are determined to avoid just such negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. No sooner had the Iranian agreement to discuss Iraq been made public on March 16 than Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns publicly ruled out any discussions with Iran on the nuclear issue.

He asserted that any such negotiations would be "futile in view of the country's track record on the issue." But he also revealed that rejecting negotiations on the nuclear enrichment is part of the

administration's strategy of pressure on Iran, referring to its "calculation that it is better to isolate the Iranian regime."

Although the administration seeks to keep co-operation with Iran over the crisis in Iraq separate from its strategy of isolation of Iran, the evolution of the Iraq crisis may make such separation impossible. The discussions on Iraq will have to involve various political formulas that the United States and Iran could both support. Iran would be asked to help sell the militant Shi'ite parties on a settlement plan with unpalatable compromises for those same parties.

If the Iranians become more deeply involved in the internal negotiation in Iraq, and the usefulness of their role becomes widely recognized, it will certainly be more difficult for the United States to resist political-diplomatic pressures to talk with Tehran about the larger issues threatening the peace of the region—Iran's nuclear program and the U.S. efforts to isolate and destabilize the regime.

Ironically, Iran's assistance in brokering a Shi'ite-Sunni political compromise has been sought by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the leader of the Supreme Council for

the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the largest party in the dominant Shi'ite alliance.

Sunni political leaders, meanwhile, have rejected the idea of U.S.-Iranian talks on a settlement, despite the fact that the Iranian support is necessary to get the Shi'ites to agree on key Sunni demands. ■

---

*Gareth Porter is the author of Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam. All rights reserved IPS.*

# Arts & Letters

## FILM

[*V for Vendetta*]

### Did I Shave My Head for This?

By Steve Sailer

A FILM CRITIC would have to hate George W. Bush awfully bad to praise the ludicrous yet humorless “V for Vendetta,” in which a disguised superhero blows up the Houses of Parliament to overthrow the clerico-fascist despotism ruling Britain in 2020. Yet a majority of movie reviewers have given their thumbs-up to “V for Vendetta,” even though it is just another masochist’s fantasy masquerading as a profound political allegory from the Wachowski siblings, the *frauteurs* who were to blame for the “Matrix” trilogy.

“V for Vendetta” started out in the 1980s as a “graphic novel”—an expensive, pretentious comic book—by Alan Moore (*League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*) about how Margaret Thatcher would turn England into a totalitarian dystopia by 1997. Well, that didn’t exactly happen, so now the Wachowskis have rewritten it as a post-9/11 fable implying that President Chimp McHitler Bushton will crush all dissent Real Soon Now. Personally, I’d rather endure a Bush press conference than see this movie again.

Remember director Ridley Scott’s famous “1984” Super Bowl commercial introducing the Apple Macintosh? Now, imagine that 45-second spot dragged out over 132 minutes. In “V for Vendetta,” the Big Brother tyrant ranting about

unity and security from a vast video screen is played by John Hurt. An ambitious, deeply religious Conservative politician, he had imposed martial law in the wake of a terrorist virus attack, putting society under the thumb of fanatical Church of England bishops. (According to Google, the phrase “fanatical Church of England bishops” has never been seen before.) The government dispatched all Muslims and homosexuals to concentration camps, although the film forgets to mention how these two victimized minorities got along on the inside.

Fortunately, V, a masked mutant survivor of a government biological warfare experiment (Hugo Weaving, Agent Smith from “The Matrix”), has risen up to challenge the clampdown all by his lonesome. In his underground redoubt, he broods surrounded by banned artworks he has liberated from the vaults of the Ministry of Objectionable Material, such as Jan Van Eyck’s immortal “Arnolfini Wedding Portrait” of 1434. You might be asking: why would a reactionary Christian government ban the masterpieces of the pious past? Simple, according to the Wachowskis: because conservatives hate art.

V’s reluctant accomplice is portrayed by Natalie Portman. Best known as Queen-Senator Padmé in the recent “Star Wars” whoop-tee-doo, Portman is a graduate of the George Lucas Academy of Dramatic Arts, and it shows. A smart, pleasant young lady offscreen who sadly lacks all charisma onscreen, she ought to go do something else with her life.

Stephen Rea portrays the hangdog Scotland Yard inspector assigned to catch V. But he discovers—prepare to expire of astonishment—that the fascist regime itself actually inflicted the “terrorist” virus epidemic! You can tell that

Rea’s character will turn out to be on the side of good because he’s half-Irish, unlike all those racially reprehensible English Nazis shouting the government’s slogan “England prevails!” Eight hundred years of successful English resistance of tyranny don’t count for much in the movies because Anglophobia is one prejudice of which today’s Hollywood approves.

Although advertised as an action film, “V for Vendetta” consists of two hours of speechifying with a big explosion at the end. It’s like “My Dinner with Andre on the Hindenburg.”

Still, all that political posturing is mostly for show. Just as the “Matrix” movies were less about philosopher Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra than about Carrie-Anne Moss dressing up in black leather and hurting men, the fetishistic point of this film is to imprison, torture, degrade, and shave the beautiful hair off of poor little Natalie Portman’s head.

You may have noticed that the silly but well-made 1999 “Matrix” credited “The Wachowski Brothers,” while its dire 2003 sequels referred to “The Wachowskis.” In 1999, Larry, the elder Wachowski, was living a normal life as a married man, so he had to sublimate his latent perversity into his art. Unfortunately, that blockbuster afforded him the money to transform his inner kinks into grotesque reality. He left his wife and moved in with a dominatrix called Ilsa Strix. Soon he was dressing as a woman, and rumors circulated that Larry planned to become a Wachowski sister. Unsurprisingly, the level of imagination in his movies collapsed.

Now, they are at least back to a “Wachowski Brothers” credit, but their films have yet to recover. ■

Rated R for strong violence and some language.