

VOICES

Make-believe terrorism has real lessons

The policy-makers had good reasons for playing 20/20's game.

By Bob Higgins

On August 6th, ABC's 20/20 staged a dramatized terrorist seizure of a full oil tanker and its crew in the New York harbor, with the threat to detonate the oil in a way that would devastate lower Manhattan. Terrorist demands in this seizure covered monetary and political concessions by the U.S. toward the Palestinian cause. The bulk of the show focused on the deliberations of a mock crisis committee, assembled in concert with the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies and composed entirely of current or former government officials. Committee members improvised debate and developments in the crisis and on possible courses of action to recommend to the TV viewer, acting as president. The program ended with the arrival of the terrorist's deadline for action, with time running out on a military "solution" to the crisis because of the danger of igniting the harbor, and with the committee chairman about to recommend negotiating an exchange of the tanker and hostages for air time to broadcast the terrorists' political views.

This show went beyond the day-to-day grounds on which media and state usually meet. The cast itself was a coup for 20/20. Policy-making elites do not ordinarily act in network shows or expose their deliberations, simulated or not, to public scrutiny. Partly for that reason, only a few of the participants were remotely recognizable—Joseph Cisco, Reagan's Navy Undersecretary John Lehman, Ron Nessen, Adam Yaroshinsky.

The cast also indicates the importance that policy-circles attach to properly-cultivated public opinion on terrorism. This priority does not necessarily reflect unanimity on techniques for dealing with terrorism—the mock committee split over negotiated and military "solutions." Yet this split rests on a shared goal of maintaining an international status quo (in the Middle East; and in our client states) that breeds the desperate acts and popular resistance. 20/20 predictably framed terrorism as an inevitability, emphasizing the *drama* of the act. This production sold the sense of threat as a media attraction.

Dramatic narration, cuts to speeding police cars, and cinema verite shots of preparations for disaster helped create this climate.

The potential of this media/political theater is ominous—the crime show/law and order combine of the 1960s on a new, explicitly anti-left plane. Crucial to the potential of this combination is the domestic unleashing of the CIA, one of Reagan's priorities and apparently a matter of increasing agreement among policy elites. ABC's simulated crisis provided a plausible case for this unleashing. The simulation involved a borderline case—international terrorism aimed at a domestic target. The CIA "chief" (former head of the CIA terrorism section, Ray Cline) played a major role in the drama, competently and calmly relaying information to the advisory committee. He also played a key role in a revealing scene where the committee disregarded restrictions on domestic surveillance.



ABC is helping the government shape your opinion on terrorism.

In that episode, an American professor (actually Professor

Judith Kipper, member of the right wing American Enterprise Institute) emerges as a contact with the terrorists. To keep tabs on her and to verify her contacts, the committee would like to tap her phone. While exuding concern about the need for a court order, the committee proceeds without one because of time problems. In such a grave situation as the crisis, to paraphrase the CIA "chief," the public will certainly understand the decision to tap without authorization.

In this scene, the "game" format of the drama is essential. The game draws viewers into playing, into identifying with the players on the advisory committee. After all, the committee is to make a recommendation to you, the viewer-as-President, on how to save a tanker, hostages, and Manhattan. Don't you want the best, most complete information?

Given the long history of state surveillance, disruption, and repression of the left, the political potential of the terrorism label is frightening. Shows like this one promote a climate in which terrorism can mean almost any form of organized resistance to the status quo.

But being afraid is nothing to be ashamed of. Fear and pain are nature's way of warning that something's wrong. But most of us, immobilized like animals at night, stand hypnotized in the glitter of the headlights that bear down on us. That's how I've felt, unable to work on the book that clutters my desk, over whose top I've sought the sky and the wind and the outdoor sounds. A book's a big job. You begin knowing it will take a long time, having to assume you *have* a long time, a future to write, a future to be read.

I don't need more facts. I know enough to know that all the new weapons, all the expendable young men, can't defend me. I'm tired from this anxiety, wondering whether I'll see my children again, whether the Wasatch mountains and the sparrow under the caves are doomed, whether I have time to finish my book.

These feelings, this fear, this grief, this anger—they're natural and sane impulses to survive. ■ Liane Ellison Norman, who teaches English at the University of Pittsburgh, is a Quaker.



In Peter Watkin's THE WAR GAME (above) the unthinkable was staged.

Fear is an instinct for survival

By Liane Ellison Norman

I'm scared. I'm sitting at my desk. Out the window there's a strip of clean sky with bright clouds over the neighbor's roof. The wind's a miracle in this heat wave. I hear an electric lawnmower, a wasp on the windowglass, a sparrow under the eaves. I feel the ache of loss. Two of my children are in California, working as farm hands. The other's in Vermont, playing Haydn trios and Mozart quartets on her violin. I want to see them, tell them, let them know the love I feel, the hopes I have. But what if I never see them again?

The other night my husband and I were sitting contented on the old front porch swing behind the cool screen of grapeleaves. The rusted chain on my side broke: I fell, a sudden racket. My instant though was, this is how it will be when the bombs begin to come. Out of nowhere. The swing will fall, a telephone pole or a car will come flying. There'll be great noise, shock. Where will the children be? Then, nothing.

Today the world's been almost too sweet to bear. I've felt

tears, thinking of the still places where I grew up in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah, where aspens quaked and wind in douglas firs made the sound of icy streams, where if you looked hard, discreet creatures trafficked busily in the trees and rocks and grasses. I can think backward, but not forward.

My son's nearly draft age. Raised a Quaker, he's a firm conscientious objector. I think of other boys, not raised Quaker, but loved as dearly. There's no war afoot, no nation attacking ours, nothing that can be won by war. Nevertheless, they are to be drafted, we hear—nothing official, just news in the air, the way warnings travel in the Wasatch among jays and squirrels and deer.

I've talked to a lot of people lately about fear and grief. It makes me tearful and shakey—they too. A group of us talked about the arms race. We told one another of our fears. Some wept. Some trembled. Some flushed. One screamed. The women said, "I fear," or "I'm scared that," wept and shivered. It was harder for the men. "People fear," or "We should," they said, but they wept and shivered too. One man spoke in meta-

phor, then broke down. "I'm scared," he said.

It's harder for the men—they've had their natural inclinations bent and broken the way Chinese girls once suffered bound feet. They're scared, but scared of being scared.

CULTURE SHOCK

PREFAB NOVELS

The latest addition to the generic section of the supermarket is the generic novel. It comes in Romance, Science Fiction, Mystery and Western, is a standard price and promises all the basic ingredients of brand name novels.

AMERICAN INGENUITY

A motorized pogo stick has been invented; it gets about 30,000 hops a gallon.



FINALLY

The newest Emily Post etiquette book offers advice to the hostess on what to do when the guests light a joint. If you're worried, she says, just apologize for "being a spoil-

sport" and tell them not to. No advice, however, on how to dispose of the offending item. (Zodiac)

A VOTE FROM GOD

A group called "Citizens for Reagan" have interpreted the president's near-miss assassination as a sign from God supporting the Reagan program. Its fundraising letter urges donations to back up the godly endorsement. (Zodiac)

Vietnam

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had to be shelved when it became apparent that their chief effect was to increase the number of refugees and further lower production.

In the face of this, it seems clear that the model of economic development in the north has little to offer to the south, despite some extremely successful producer-cooperative ventures such as the *Tin Sang* newspaper co-op and the Ho Chi Minh City lacquerware factory.

The leaders of Vietnam are for the most part elderly men who, after leading their country through decades of struggle, might understandably be stuck in their ways. On the contrary, however, they have shown themselves open to new ideas in ways that would be quite impossible in a truly Stalinist state.

They recognized that if the economy of Vietnam is ever to revive they will have to look beyond their own experience in the north or that of the Soviet Union for inspiration. Instead they have embarked on a series of radical economic experiments.

Just recently, three private import-export companies have been set up in Ho Chi Minh City. They will operate in competition with the none-too-efficient state trading company. The go-ahead has also been given in principle to a trade promotion center to be run by former businessmen. The center is expected to have the authority to establish direct trading links with the outside world in an effort to market locally produced goods without reference to the inefficient state trading machinery.

Certain selected cooperatives, instead of having to sell their produce to the state at a fixed price, are being allowed to sell directly on the free market. That move has boosted production and wages, but it has also resulted in enormous inequalities in earnings. Since there is not yet any form of income tax, these inequalities will go unchecked for the time being.

Perhaps the boldest experiment so far has been taking place at Long An, a prosperous market town just south of Ho Chi Minh City. Here, last November, the authorities introduced what Ronald Reagan would call a "free enterprise zone" and what the Vietnamese call a "one-price policy."

For a trial period, the ration system—under which all government employees can buy essential commodities at heavily subsidized prices—was abolished. Instead the wages of government employees were substantially increased to enable them to buy on the free market. This also meant that local farmers were no longer obliged to sell part of their production to the state at fixed prices.

Apparently the effect on production was dramatic: the amount of commodities such as pork and eggs on the market trebled. But the results are being treated with caution, since Long An is an exceptionally prosperous market town and the experiment took place at the time of a very good rice harvest. Had it occurred at another time or in another place, the outcome might have been different.

In the long term, however, no amount

of experimenting will solve Vietnam's massive problems. What the country needs above all is good harvests, its own oil supplies and a stable international situation that will enable it to demobilize part of the huge army presently tied down in Kampuchea and on the border with China.

Among other things, a settlement in Kampuchea would remove one of the main sticking points in Vietnam's relations with China. If relations with China could ever be normalized—they will nev-

"noble and generous action of the Soviet Union" in Afghanistan; the Russian tourists whose tours seem to cost only a fraction of the price charged to other visitors.

Since the war the Russians are said to have increased the price of oil they send to Vietnam by nearly 20 times—to the point where it is just below the OPEC price. The current black market price of gasoline is 91 Dong (\$28) a gallon.

On top of which the quality of technicians trained in Eastern Europe or the

conclusion that—with the notable exception of Sweden—many Western countries still consider themselves to be at war with Vietnam—albeit war by other means.

Two years ago a World Bank loan to Vietnam was withheld after the United States threatened to withdraw its contribution to the Bank if the loan went ahead. Recent visitors to a hospital in Ho Chi Minh City were shown children suffering from malnutrition. The doctor in charge said the problem got worse since the Common Market cut off supplies of surplus milk powder to the hospital in mid-1979.

Last year arrangements were made to enable former civil servants of the French colonial regime to receive their pensions in Vietnam at a favorable rate of exchange. The arrangements fell through at the last minute—apparently because the French had been hobbled by the Americans.

The result has been to drive Vietnam deeper into the arms of the Soviet Union. One American-educated former high official of the old regime, now an economic adviser to the new one, says: "I wish I could speak openly to the West. I would say loudly, 'You have got to help Vietnam—otherwise it will fall into the Soviet sphere, and once in it will be very difficult to get out.'"

Help for Vietnam should not be based on a desire to turn the country into a happy hunting ground for Western capital. The Western model of economic development is as irrelevant to the needs of such a poor rural country as is Soviet state socialism, weighed down as it is by bureaucracy and over-centralization.

What Vietnam desperately needs is breathing space, relief from the endless litany of disasters—man-made and natural—that have cursed its poor, exhausted people for all of living memory.

From where Vietnam is now standing there are two roads forward, both clearly sign-posted. One is marked "Stalinism" and leads to a bureaucratic, authoritarian, police-ridden society. The other leads to a humane, "small is beautiful," non-aligned type of socialism of the kind to which many socialists in the West aspire.

It is by no means inevitable that Vietnam should follow the first path, but with every day the West maintains its policy of isolating Vietnam, time is running out.

Chris Mullin, a former London correspondent for In These Times, has been filing a series of reports from Southeast Asia.



Five years after reunification, most farmers in the south continue to sell their produce on the free market.

er be the same again after China's 1979 invasion—Vietnam could begin to dismantle its huge army. At the moment, most of the best technicians, administrators and engineers, not to mention at least 50 percent of all government spending, are tied down in the armed forces.

Dependence on the Soviets.

In the meantime, Vietnam is utterly dependent upon the Soviet Union for supplies of oil, food grain and huge quantities of military hardware. The Vietnamese fought very hard for their independence and it need not be supposed that they relish dependence on any superpower.

Nor are they naive enough to pretend there is no price to pay. Already there are small signs: the Vietnamese soldiers goose-stepping outside the mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi's Ba Dinh Square; Vietnamese support for the

Soviet Union is far below that of officials trained in France or the U.S. This is painfully obvious on some enterprises in the south, where Soviet-trained technicians find themselves working alongside counterparts trained in the West.

In due course the Soviet Union will want naval bases in Vietnam. (Russian warships already have "refueling facilities" and it is a moot point when a refueling facility becomes a base.) No doubt the West will reserve the right to whine that this proves that Vietnam has always been a Soviet satellite.

But what choice do they have? In the circumstances it might have been understandable if Vietnam had immediately after the war thrown its lot in, lock, stock and barrel, with the Soviet Union. But it did not. The Vietnamese government tried very hard to develop relations with the West—the U.S. included.

Today it is difficult to escape the con-

bring independent films to a wider audience and sell them to wider markets.

Clearly, if this generation of filmmakers is going to get past its "first wave," it'll take a fierce amount of entrepreneurial hustle. And as everyone seems aware, it'll also take the serving of a community's needs. The recent success these young filmmakers—many of them still graduate students—is as yet, more a sign of hope than a firm stand. Their achievements make it possible—indeed, necessary—to ask the next pointed questions: what is it that black Americans need to know, and how do filmmakers conduct a dialogue to serve that need?

"After all," cautions Haile Gerima, a black filmmaker (*Bush Mama; Wilmington 10, U.S.A. 10,000*) who no longer includes his films in festivals but concen-

trates on community showing, "this isn't the first time that black filmmakers have emerged. The audience you create today will betray you tomorrow if there isn't an honest marriage between audience and filmmaker.

"For a culture to survive you need three things. You need creative artists; an audience—and this one has been built by Hollywood; and honest critics. Consumers, filmmakers and critics—we create each other. A work of art is the result of a synthesis between the struggle of all three.

The Black Filmmaker Foundation's address is WNYC-TV, One Centre St., 26th floor, NYC 10007. Chamba Notes is available from P.O. Box 1669, Hollywood, CA 90028.

Movies

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films. Big brother isn't so big—they're in the same boat we are."

Black independents can and do link up with other independents, though. They share in the slowly-growing network of independent film services. The Black Filmmaker Foundation, for instance, works closely with the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, lobbying for access to public TV time for independents and for grant opportunities. Hudlin among others works on the Independent Feature project and the America Film Market, two new organizations that

CALENDAR

Use the calendar to announce conferences, lectures, films, events, etc. The cost is \$20.00 for two insertions and \$10.00 for each additional insert, for copy of 40 words or less (additional words are 35¢ each). Payment must accompany your announcement, and should be sent to the attention of Bill Rehm.

CORNWALL, CT

August 26-30

Left Economic Strategy for the 1980s: URPE (Union for Radical Political Economics) Annual Summer Conference at Camp Mohawk. Speakers include: Barry Commoner, Mark Green, Barry Bluestone, Sam Bowles, Joan Greenbaum, Judy Gregory, Carol O'Cleiracain, Anno Saxenian and Harley Shaiken.

Must pre-register: URPE, 40 Union Square West, Room 901, New York, NY 10003. (212) 691-5722.

NEW YORK, NY

September 3-6

Annual meeting of the Caucus for a New Political Science will be all about feminism and socialism. At the New York Hilton. For more information contact: CNPS, 420 West 118th St., Room 733, New York, N.Y. 10027.

WASHINGTON, DC

September 26-27

First national conference of the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty at the 4-H Center. Speakers include Ramsey Clark and Coretta Scott King. For details contact: Anne Headley, 324 C St., SE, Washington, DC 20003, or call (202) 547-3635.

DIRECTORY

The Directory is published to facilitate contact with organizations frequently referred to in the pages of *In These Times*. Each organization has paid a fee for its listing.

Association for Workplace Democracy
1747 Connecticut Ave, N.W.
Washington, DC 20009

Citizens Energy Project
1110 6th Street, N.W., #306
Washington, DC 20001

The Citizens Party of Illinois
109 N. Dearborn, Suite 603
Chicago, IL 60602
(312) 332-2066

Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy
120 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, DC 20002

C.O.I.N.—Consumers Opposed to Inflation in the Necessities
2000 P Street, N.W.
Suite 413
Washington, DC 20036

DSOC—Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee
853 Broadway, Room 801
New York, NY 10003

Midwest Academy
600 West Fullerton Ave.
Chicago, IL 60614

National Center for Economic Alternatives
2000 P Street, N.W.
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036

NAM—New American Movement
3244 N. Clark St.
Chicago, IL 60657

New Patriot Alliance
343 S. Dearborn, Room 305
Chicago, IL 60604

Science for the People
897 Main Street
Cambridge, MA 02139

Socialist Party
1011 N. 3rd St., No. 201
Milwaukee, WI 53203