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ANGELS CHASING DEMONS: “Jesus Killed Mohammad”!

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Investigative journalism is at the beginning of connecting dots, not just on America’s torture chambers but also on its Crusade-like motivation disguised as spreading globalization and democracy. In this writing I will analyze two cases: U.S. Military Evangelicals’ efforts to convert Afghans to Christianity, and Pentagon’s Crusade-like messaging to the Commander-in-Chief.

AFGHANISTAN BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

POLITICAL PERSEPECTIVES ON CRUSADES. Afghan resistance brought about the collapse of Soviet communism and its European satellites. In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Christian Evangelicals considered America more and more as God’s chosen nation, capitalism as “sacrosanct”, globalization (a euphemism for American imperial ambitions) as a “blessing” and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq as a “Crusade”. Both economic and religious factors played central role in the politics of the Western world.

The end of the Cold War empowered Christian Evangelicals in their efforts to Christianize the world and fight the “evil”. Liberal intellectual and supporter of former President George W. Bush’s foreign policy Thomas Friedman indicated that “McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15” jet. (Friedman quoted in John Pilger, *The New Rulers of the World*, Verso edition 2003, p. 119). Retired U.S. Professor of History Chalmers Johnson wrote in 2004 about the connection of imperialism and war: “War and imperialism are Siamese twins joined at the hip....Imperialism is the single greatest cause of war, and war is the midwife of new imperialist acquisitions.”(Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy and the End of the Republic*, Metropolitan Book/Henry Holt, 2004, p. 187). While the Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini looked at America as “great Satan”,

twenty-six years ago in 1983, U.S. President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) characterized the former Soviet Union as “evil empire” which refers to the Biblical “evil confederation”. (See former Republican strategist and current political analyst Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*, Viking/Penguin Group, 2006). After the disintegration of the Soviet empire (1989-1991), the American religious conservatives discovered a new list for the enemies. Listen to Kevin Philips: “U.S. religious conservatives quickly identified a roster of replacements: Islam as the primary evil force and Iraq and Saddam Hussein, respectively as (1) the embodiment of the evil Babylon; and (2) the leading new contender for the role of antichrist.” (Ibid. pp.251 and 260). Former Republican strategist Kevin Phillips reminded us about former President George W. Bush’s “inspirational reading each morning” as follows: “Unmindful Western nations may still be playing out the Crusades hand....in the months before George W. Bush sent U.S. troops into Iraq, his inspirational reading each morning was a book of Sermons by a Scottish preacher accompanying [British/Jewish immigrants] troops about to march on Jerusalem in 1917.” (Ibid. p.250)

The words “Crusade” and “infinite justice” during the initial pronouncements served as reactions to the 911 catastrophe. Just a few days after the 911 attacks, President Bush (2001-2009) himself used the term “crusade” on Sunday, September 16, 2001, and warned that “this crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take awhile.” His Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called the invasion of Afghanistan “Operation Infinite Justice”. The Muslim world instantly noticed with alarm these linguistic usages. To minimize the Muslim reaction to the American invasion of Afghanistan, the warlords in Washington changed the title of their aggression on Afghanistan from crusade to “Operation Enduring Freedom”. In Lebanon Shaikh Afif Al-Nabulsi called Rumsfeld’s infinite justice “Infinite Injustice” while an Iranian publication referred to it as “Infinite Imperialism”. American war in Muslim land reminded Muslims of the Christian Crusades in the Middle Ages. All Latin Christendom went on Crusades to win back the Holy Land from Muslims. This way, the war itself reflected the purposes of religion. Former nun and current writer Karen Armstrong has studied religions for more than two decades and has published illuminating and insightful books on comparative religion. For the effect of crusades on contemporary world, see her cutting-edge book: *Holy War: Crusades and Their Impact on Today’s World* (Doubleday, 1991).

HUNTING AFGHANS FOR JESUS. After a report on Al Jazeera had shown footage of U.S. soldiers at Bagram Air Base near the capital of Afghanistan discussing the methods of how to convert Afghans to Christianity, former Afghan Prime Minister Engineer Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai called for investigation into this issue. But U.S. military sharply criticized Al Jazeera and denied any “effort to go out and proselytize to Afghans.” To counter U.S. Military allegation, on Tuesday (May 5, 2009) Al Jazeera released unedited footage of the U.S. soldiers’ Bible Study in Bagram. The initial report aired by Al Jazeera included footage of Lieutenant-Colonel Gary Hensley, the chief of the U.S. Military chaplains in Afghanistan, encouraging soldiers to “hunt people for Jesus. We do. We hunt them down, get the hound of heaven after them, so we get them into kingdom. Right? That is what we do. That is our business.” America’s queen for truthful journalism Amy Goodman of “Democracy Now!” radio talk show interviewed two guests who had closely followed the above issue: Jeff Sharlet and Mikey Weinstein. I start first with Jeff Sharlet . Who is he to listen to?

JEFF SHARLET is religion and journalism scholar at the New York University. He is a contributing editor of Harper's and Rolling Stone. His works has also appeared in several journals. His two books are relevant to the theme at hand. Sharlet is coauthor, with Peter Manseau, of the book: *Killing Buddha: A Heretic's Bible* (Free Press,2004). Publisher Weekly comments on this book: "take two religiously flippant intellectuals (Manseau and Sharlet) and send them on a yearlong road trip to discover the underbelly of America's religious culture." The Buddha is not a real one. He is just an "expression of your longing." If not killed, he "will only stand in your way." (p.1). Also, Sharlet is the author of another illuminating book: *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (Harper,2008). The Family is a Christian political organization that used many names but most commonly is known as "The Fellowship" or "The Family". This organization or movement, without any formal membership, organizes National Prayer Breakfast held each year in February in Washington, D.C. First held in 1953, the event is now attended by some four thousand guests including dignitaries from many nations. The event is officially hosted by members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans. "The Family's most visible activity is its blandly innocuous National Prayer Breakfast.... But almost all its real work goes on behind the scenes-knitting together international networks of right-wing leaders, most of them ostensibly Christian."(Barbara Ehrenreich,"Hillary's Nasty Pastorate" in *The Nation*, March 19, 2008). Ben Daniel is a Presbyterian minister and columnist. In his book review of *The Family*, Ben Daniel introduces us to its subject: The Family or The Fellowship is "a self-identified 'Christian Mafia', which, for seven decades, has operated in the shadows of American power, exerting great influence without accountability or oversight. They are evangelists and powerbrokers with a theocratic agenda, a lust for power and strange fondness for such creeps of history as Adolf Hitler, Mao Tsedung, and Genghis Khan"(First published on UPI's Religion and Spirituality Forum on May 26, 2008. Visit also bendaniel.org). Doug Coe, the spiritual leader of The Family or the Fellowship is "a man Hillary Clinton has called a 'genuinely loving spiritual guide and mentor for many' has been caught on tape praising the personal relationships shared by Hitler, Goebbels[German Nazi propaganda minister] and Himmler[German Nazi SS official]. In the same speech", Daniel continues, "Coe expressed admiration for the dedication of Chinese soldiers who, according to Coe, were forced to chop off the heads of their mothers as a demonstration of their commitment to the People's Republic of China."("Doug Coe, The Fellowship, Hillary Clinton and Why You Should Care", first published on UPI's Religion and Spirituality Forum on April 14, 2008). In 2002 Jeff Sharlet joined The Family's home for young men. "Brothers" meeting together in a "huddle" where a man is "no longer an individual but part of the Lord's revolution, his will transformed into a weapon for what the young men call 'spiritual war'." The slogans of the leader are: "<We work with power where we can>, the Family's leader, Doug Coe, says,<build new power where we can>." (Jeff Sharlet, "Jesus Plus Nothing: Undercover among America's Secret Theocrats", in Harper's Magazine, March 2003). Jeff Sharlet is a contributing editor of Harper's and an associate research scholar at the New York University Center for Religion and Media. Amy Goodman of "Democracy Now!" wanted to know Sharlet's feedback on the Al Jazeera's videotapes: " I think", Sharlet said, "that is anything but truth....But most frighteningly, it's concentrated in the Officer Corps....Lieutenant Hensley...was at the time...top military Chaplain in Afghanistan....if you look closer at the T-shirt he is wearing, it shows his affiliation with a sort of fundamentalist group called Chapel Next. And you can see a sort of Christian cross inscribed over a map of Afghanistan." Sharlet gave information about Lieutenant-Colonel Bob Young at the Kandahar Air Base in Afghanistan. He was "quite plain in boasting about a

PowerPoint presentation he had given to Afghan warlords explaining that American government was based on Christianity, that our Christian god was what made it great, and Afghanistan had a choice if it wanted to achieve democracy. And of course that choice was going to be for Jesus.” Shortly before Al Jazeera footage became news, Jeff Sharlet had published on April 27, 2009 an article (in the May, 2009 issue of Harper’s Magazine) with a breathtaking title: “Jesus Killed Mohammad”. Amy Goodman of “Democracy Now!” wanted to know from Sharlet where did this come from. Sharlet described “the most frightening story”: Staff Sergeant Jeffery Humphrey was stationed in Samarra, Iraq. He was one of the “very few soldiers who ...had the courage” to speak out about his observations. “It was Easter. The day began calmly. A chaplain brought around a copy of Mel Gibson’s anti-Semitic film Passion of the Christ, which they put on constant play throughout the day”, Sharlet continued Humphrey’s story. When the army unit, to which Humphrey was assigned, came under attack, an Iraqi-American Christian translator, “paint[ed] in giant red Arabic letters on the side of a Bradley fighting vehicle the words <Jesus Killed Mohammad>. Then, while they put the translator on the roof with a bullhorn, shouting in Arabic, <Jesus Killed Mohammad>, and then training their guns, training American guns on anybody who responded, the Bradley fighting vehicle rolled out into the city of Samarra and drawing fire everywhere it went.” This brought the Special Forces unit to the conclusion that “every single Iraqi who took offense at these words, <Jesus Killed Mohammad>, was part of the enemy and therefore needed to be destroyed.” Jeff Sharlet talked to the driver of the Bradley vehicle, Lieutenant John DeGuilio, “now captain John DeGuilio, promoted since. And he describes wreaking almost biblical destruction on one whole block , blowing up every single thing he saw.” Captain DeGuilio continued his story that “he was able to do this, because God was on his side and because he had been spiritually armored by watching Mel Gibson’s [film] Passion of the Christ. And then he thanked his chaplain for preparing him for that kind of spiritual battle on the street of Iraq.”

MIKEY WEINSTEIN. Why we shall listen to him with regard to our topic? For several reason: He is Air Force veteran, the founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), and a registered Republican who served as legal counsel to the Ronal Reagan Administration for three years. Also, he is the author of the book: *With God on Our Side: One Man’s War against an Evangelical Coup in America’s Military* (Thomas Dunne, 2006). Weinstein became famous because of this book. During a Buzzflash interview on June 13, 2007, He introduce himself as follows: “My family is a Jewish-American family, so a little bit unique in that we have three consecutive generations of military academy graduates....In my immediate family, we have over 120 years of combined military service to the country, in pretty much every combat engagement America’s been in from World War I to **the current so-called global war on terror**[emphasis added].”

Weinstein is “a registered Republican”, he continues, “and I spent over three years in the West Wing of the [President Ronald] Reagan White House, initially working for the Office of Management and Budget. Then I moved over to become Assistant General Counsel for the entire White House Office of Administration.” He adds that “There, I was named the committee management officer for the Iran-Contra investigation.” Mikey Weinstein became famous because of the vitally important, challenging and provocative book- *With God on Ours Side*. Air Force veteran Weinstein is waging a different kind of war against those Evangelicals within the U.S. military who are trying to spiritually transform it-literally “with ambassadors for Christ in uniform.” Former U.S. Ambassador Joseph C. Wilson IV and author of the book (*The Politics of*

Truth, 2004) comments on Weinstein's book, which is "the story of one man's willingness to stand up for the Constitution of the United States. Arrayed against Mikey Weinstein are those who would transform the United States military...into a force of evangelical crusaders, intolerant of the diversity of our society and willfully subversive of our national security interests. It is an important call to arms for all who love our country and the principles for which it stands."

Mikey Weinstein explained to Amy Goodman of "Democracy Now!" his understanding of the process of Christian fundamentalist indoctrination within the U.S. military. The first thing is that World War II Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe and U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower (1913-1961) in his Farewell Address to the Nation (January 17, 1961) warned America of the dangers of "military-industrial complex". In this speech he warned of the "grave implications" to the "very structure of our society" if military meshes inextricably with private sector. "In the councils of government", Eisenhower intoned, "we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the **military-industrial complex.**" These concerns are drawing new voice. "What we're really faced with here", according to Mikey Weinstein, "is a **fundamentalist-Christian-parachurch-military-corporate-proselytizing complex.**" A few months ago Weinstein brought to the attention of an American four-star general, who is commanding hundreds of thousands of troops, the "gravity", the might of the U.S. military. "It is that ubiquitous...it is in the very particulate of technologically most lethal organization ever created by human kind, which is our U.S. military", Weinstein emphasized. "We are about two inches away... from a fundamentalist Christian America through our U.S. military." Weinstein points to the para-church organizations, for example: the Worldwide Military Baptist Mission, the Soldiers Bible Ministry, and the Campus Crusades Military Ministry. "You can't count them all...We look exactly like the Crusaders of 1096 to the Iraqis and now the Afghans." The group of Officers Christian Fellowship is "growing at three percent a year. It is represented on 80 percent of military installations around the world." Mikey Weinstein elaborated on the Christian Embassy video, about which first Jeff Sharlet had written in 2006. "This was a group of senior Pentagon Officials, some of them like Pete Green, who is currently the Secretary of the Army, a number of generals and other folks that were in uniform being filmed in the Pentagon, and they were pushing the mission of this extreme right-wing fundamentalist Christian organization called the Christian Embassy."

PENTAGON'S CRUSADE-LIKE MESSAGING TO THE PRESIDENT

Reports on how to proselytize to Afghans at the beginning of May, 2009, are still fresh in public memory, new revelations of the past eight-year nightmare hit the Obama Administration: An investigative report in GQ Magazine (May 17, 2009) revealed Biblical quotes used by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (2001-2006) during the early days of the Iraq war in top-secret war briefings for President George W. Bush, who just after the 9/11 catastrophe (September 11, 2001) referred to America's war on terror as a "crusade". These documents, known as Worldwide Intelligence Update, were often delivered by hand to the White House by Rumsfeld himself, and they were presenting triumphal color photos of the war headlined by inspirational Biblical verses.

Paraphrasing Al Pacino in the "Godfather III" film, Frank Rich (New York Times, May 16, 2009) wrote that "just when we thought we were out, the Bush mob keeps pulling us back in. And will keep doing so...Until there is true transparency and true accountability..." President

Bush was criticized for saying the word “crusade”, so he did not use it anymore. However, Donald Rumsfeld, who does not wear his religion on his sleeves, knew that Bush believed he was on a mission from God, so he purposefully fed into that belief with the Biblical quotes which may raise some eyebrows.

Below are two examples of the Bible quotes: (1) “Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith.” [This Bible verse appeared over an image of tanks entering an Iraqi city]. (2) “It is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” [This Bible verse appeared over an image of Saddam Hussein]. However, General Shaffer and his “seniors” (Bush, Rumsfeld, and General Richard Meyers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) completely ignored this Bible verse: “Thou Shall Not Kill.”

ROBERT DRAPER is GQ Magazine’s correspondent, investigative journalist, and author of the book : Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush, 2007. He revealed in his recent lengthy article, “And He Shall Be Judged” (GQ Magazine, May 17, 2009), Rumsfeld’s story of feeding into Bush’s belief with Bible verses. Draper told Amy Goodman of “Democracy Now!” during an interview (May 19, 2009): Major General Glenn Shaffer was Director of Intelligence at Pentagon. He “created” the intelligence updates adorned with Bible verses “for the eyes of the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Commander-in-Chief” [President Bush]. Major General Shaffer “had decided on his own to supply this cover sheet that would accompany photographs with these Biblical quotes....The general who created them told other people that he would continue to produce these, because his <seniors>”, namely, Rumsfeld, Richard Meyers and Bush, “appreciated them.” Wouldn’t this be considered proselytizing, and isn’t that a violation of Department of Defense rules?!

To conclude the discussion, I would like to ask two questions followed by a reminder as follows: (1) Should the U.S. military be allowed to conduct crusades and to be a fighting force for fundamentalism? (2) Would it be a very dangerous trend if the politics of military-industrial-corporate-fundamentalist-Christian-parachurch complex be wrapped in a U.S. flag carrying a cross?

Remember that Hitler neither invented the word fascisms nor anti-Semitism; however, plenty of people marched behind the Fuehrer when the time came. The crusaders within the U.S. military just did not pop up with the arrival of George W. Bush, but were on the scene before his war on terror started in September of 2001.

May 23, 2009.