

## WHERE SHEEP MAY SAFELY GRAZE

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6 October 2002

Lately I have been thinking about sheep. I have not met sheep personally, but I have an image of a pastoral scene with lush green grass against a hillside. Perhaps a shepherd plays his flute to pass the time. In the evening he shepherds them into a safer enclosure for the night. But since I do not know sheep first hand, it seemed natural to look up some fast facts on the web.

Sheep may safely graze in pastures and forests, at least during the day. To protect them from predators they are frequently herded into fenced enclosures and guarded at night by shepherds, guard dogs, donkeys, llamas, electric fences, and noise-making devices. Their predators are mostly coyotes, at 62 percent, dogs kill 9 percent, and mountain lions, cougars, and pumas kill another 7 percent.

The United States, including all fifty states, has a population of 6.9 million head of sheep and lambs. Texas alone has over a million, more than any other state. Sixty three percent of them are shorn in April, May, and June, to produce nearly 50 million pounds of wool.

Sheep are used to control brush and weeds. Their grazing actually helps increase growth of Douglas firs and other conifers. It reduces the need for manual clearing and reduces the risk of forest fire. Their hooves puncture the soil, which helps water go in and seedlings come up.

But danger lurks beyond the pasture. The sheep seem a little restless. In the spring most of them will be shorn. Some of them likely will be led to slaughter. Richard Paul, whom I met at First UU Church several weeks ago, believes the American people have been like sheep, unaware of dangerous predators. So if we are the sheep, who are the predators? Here's a familiar list, depending on your interpretation of our pending war in Iraq:

al Queda	China	CEOs
Saddam Hussein	Tony Blair	Hawks
George Bush	the election	doves
United Nations	the economy	wolves
France, Russia	oil	those who question

or perhaps we have boys and girls crying "Wolf!"

The sheep are getting penned in by wolves, or coyotes, if you prefer. But look! There are a few black sheep over there that are bleating a different tune: Maybe we don't need to go to war. But most of us are milling about in the middle of the pasture. We are not yet ready to make up our minds whether or not the country should go to war. Those of us who think war is necessary still worry about the loss of life and the potential for disaster in the Middle East.

Last week I was in Waco, and one young man got up to describe the gray area in which he is

living. I didn't know what he meant, but after the service he told me he is an officer in the armored cavalry at Ft. Hood. He and his men are training every day for urban warfare. He refers to this time as a gray area--he's ready to go, because that's his job, but the future is terribly uncertain. His wife was in tears as he spoke. Their children are too young to understand.

Those of us who argue for trying every possible means before resorting to war still worry about the potential danger in waiting too long. However, I believe it is important that we engage in serious conversation about the issues; that we ask questions; and that we state our opinions even if our friends on one side or the other disagree. Democrats Lloyd Doggett and Barbara Lee and even Republicans Dick Armey and Ron Paul have expressed reservations, if not outright opposition to military intervention in Iraq.

Sometimes a look at history provides insight when seen through a contemporary lens. Sergei Krushchev, who was at the LBJ Library this week to talk about the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, described the Iron Curtain as a mirror. The United States and the Soviet Union looked at each other and assumed that the other would behave as they themselves would in similar circumstances, without really understanding one another's culture and conduct. In the October issue of *American Heritage*, Krushchev wrote,

"We survived, and I could write this article for the [40<sup>th</sup>] anniversary, and you can read it. But everything might have turned out differently. You, I, and all mankind might have disappeared from the face of the earth. The fact that this did not happen is the greatest achievement of those Cold War warriors President John F. Kennedy and my father, the premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev. Father said, more than once, 'We differed from Kennedy in every respect. He defended his capitalist belief, his world, and we defended ours, our concept of justice. We had one thing in common: Both he and I did everything we could to preserve peace on earth.'"

Today's President Bush and Saddam Hussein are watching each other closely, making assumptions about what the other will do. Is there some possibility that the United States can do more to preserve peace on earth?

At a press conference this week, over 70 Austin area clergy gathered at University Baptist Church in hopes of promoting peace. We were protesting the mad dash to war that Bush seems determined to wage. Imam Safdar Razi (Imam of the Islamic Ahlul Bayt Association in Austin) made an interesting statement regarding the terrorists when he said we need to stand on the principles of just war in response to their criminal actions.

The principles of the justice of war are commonly held to be:

- having just cause,
- being declared by a proper authority,
- possessing right intention,
- having a reasonable chance of success,
- and the end being proportional to the means used.

Some of today's arguments rest on just war theory. For instance, who is the legitimate authority?

The President, the United States, Congress, the United Nations? Does a preemptive strike qualify as a last resort? Is this the best way to go after Saddam Hussein? There are questions about the aftermath: Will we trigger a regional eruption of violence? Will there be widespread casualties? After the dust settles will there be a more just and peaceful world?

It made a certain amount of sense to go after the Taliban and al Qaeda, though by some measures we may have failed in that mission. Afghanistan is virtually destroyed, we have not found even half of the most wanted Qaeda leaders, and we have warlords from the Northern Alliance now in charge. They are fighting each other again just as they have for centuries.

Afghan children and adults have lost arms, legs, and eyes. Villages have buried dozens of people just because they happened to live somewhere near a vaguely defined military target. These are the stories we do not see as readily as we saw the casualties in New York last year. We are Afghanistan's terrorists. In Iraq there are Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish factions, and even some Christians. Children are dying from curable diseases because medicine is scarce. Water is contaminated by sewage. Iraqis have little history as a free and stable nation. We need to think way beyond war and way beyond November elections.

One of the seven principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association is the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. By contrast, our President's goal appears to be world domination. His strategy has been to stake out a position, refuse to budge, and pressure others into going along with him.

Jack Balkin wrote [in the *Hartford Courant*] that Bush is right about one thing. "Today the world faces a single man armed with weapons of mass destruction, manifesting an aggressive, bullying attitude, who may well plunge the world into chaos and bloodshed if he miscalculates. . . . The problem is that his name is George W. Bush, and he is our president."

Why IS the president so gung ho about war? Of all the opinions I have read in recent weeks, one by Jay Bookman, deputy editor of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (9/29/02; reprinted in *Austin American-Statesman* 10/6/02), makes the most sense to me. He raises questions about a connection between Iraq and al Qaeda. In Bookman's words,

"The pieces just didn't fit. Something else had to be going on; something was missing.

"In recent days, those missing pieces have finally begun to fall into place. As it turns out, this is not really about Iraq. It is not about weapons of mass destruction, or terrorism, or Saddam, or U.N. resolutions.

"This war, should it come, is intended to mark the official emergence of the United States as a full-fledged global empire, seizing sole responsibility and authority as planetary policeman. It would be the culmination of a plan 10 years or more in the making, carried out by those who believe the United States must seize the opportunity for global domination, even if it means becoming the "American imperialists" that our enemies always claimed we were.

"Once that is understood, other mysteries solve themselves. For example, why does the administration seem unconcerned about an exit strategy from Iraq once Saddam is toppled?"

"Because we won't be leaving. Having conquered Iraq, the United States will create permanent military bases in that country from which to dominate the Middle East, including neighboring Iran.

". . . 57 years after World War II ended, we still have major bases in Germany and Japan. We will do the same in Iraq."

Bookman based his conclusions on the National Security Strategy, released Sept. 20, 2001, which in turn uses language from a report by the Project for the New American Century, released in September 2000. The Project for the New American Century was established in the spring of 1997. It is a non-profit, educational organization whose goal is to promote American global leadership. Paul Wolfowitz wrote the draft for the 2000 report. Five other contributors are also now in service to Bush and Cheney.

The 2000 report directly acknowledges its debt to a document drafted in 1992 by the Defense Department. When it was leaked to the press, the proposal brought so much criticism that it was quickly removed and rejected by the first President Bush.

But it's back in a new form, promoted by none other than his son who made it to the White House. With all due respect to the President, I believe this is a misguided effort. We can do better than this.

Oh, sure. Wouldn't it be nice to control such huge oil fields? Why conserve when we can conquer land? We are so good we deserve to sit on top of the world and take whatever we want. We are so good we can persuade the United Nations to go along with us even while we withhold dues. After all, we need those dues for ourselves to help fund \$387 billion (with a "b") dollars for military spending and homeland security. Too bad we won't actually be more secure, but that's the price we pay for playing king of the mountain.

I agree with Martin Bryant, who has traveled overseas far more than I, that these are the kinds of reasons that we are resented. We consume a huge proportion of the world's resources. We use our economic and military power to control foreign governments. "Frankly," Martin says, "we are bullies—who force others to accept our version of what is 'right for them' or 'right for us' and enforce this with our might and money." People don't hate us for our freedom nor for our democracy. Our domestic life is rather appealing. However, people have suffered because of our foreign policy. As a world leader, we should be building a better world, not tearing it apart.

Veterans of war tend to see war as a very last resort. My father-in-law never served in the military because of his work as a mining engineer in a critical field. Nevertheless, he was always the first one to advocate military action. His friends who did serve in World War II came home and didn't even want to talk about it.

We do not stand in exactly the same place on this issue--it is too complex for absolute certainty. But we do stand in the same faith tradition that loves to ask questions. We need to make space to voice our concerns and to listen respectfully to our differences. Black and white thinking of war versus no war covers up the subtle reasoning behind it.

We must always keep in mind that military families need our support as their loved ones shoulder the huge burden of defending our freedom. There are valid reasons for wanting to remove Saddam Hussein from power. What price are we willing to pay? Who will take his place? How can we assist families, political leaders, and military personnel once the fighting is over?

Perhaps our nation will soon be at war. How then shall we work for peace? Certainly we need to let our elected officials know about our questions and convictions. The Gray Panthers hosted a town meeting with Lloyd Doggett at First UU Church last week. About 500 people showed up to hear from him and to applaud his leadership in raising questions about the war.

Some UUs have been writing to the Austin American-Statesman. Just this week I have seen letters from Eddie Collins and Don Laird. Another strategy is to write to newspaper columnists. Write in care of the paper or make use of the email address that appears at the end of the column. Columnists need to hear from us—our questions, appreciation for their perspective, ideas for future columns. Occasionally I hear from someone who reads my columns in *The Bryan-College Station Eagle*. Whether people agree with me or not, they always provide food for thought.

Over 1000 Austinites showed up yesterday for an antiwar march to the Federal Building, including many of you. At least three television stations covered the event on local news, and the Statesman has a brief article in this morning's paper. A dozen protestors against the protest gathered around a large sign that said, "The Radical Left Hates America." Fox News, Rush Limbaugh, and others routinely paint dissenters as unpatriotic and misguided at best. They keep saying things like, "THESE PEOPLE will stop at nothing." By contrast, Dan Rather said, "The idea that patriotism is wearing a flag in your lapel and never saying anything bad about whoever is in power . . . is not consistent with the American character" (Quoted in the Austin American-Statesman, September 15, 2002).

All of this is happening even before the first missile is launched—this time around.

If we put as much effort into non-violence as we do into warfare; if we built a center for peace and conflict management alongside every new prison; if we promoted cooperation instead of aggression, we would transform ourselves and our society. Just imagine the United States as a world leader for peace.

My sister Madeleine Trichel is the Executive Director of the Interfaith Center for Peace in Columbus, Ohio. She writes,

"The voices of Peacemakers speak clearly and consistently today. They call on us to mourn those who are lost, and to support their families and friends. They remind us that every act of violence sets the stage for the next; every battle prepares for the next battle;

every war sows the seed for the next war.”

As for me, I have faith in the wisdom of spiritual leaders throughout human history. We are one nation among many in a global community. We are called to work twice as hard for peace—yes, twice as hard for peace—as we ever did for war.

We are sheep only if we continue to ignore what’s going on just beyond the edge of the pasture. Let us not be led like lambs to the slaughterhouse.

Amen