



laetus in praesens

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Politicization of Evidence in the Plastic Turkey Era al-Qaida, Saddam, Assassination and the Hijab

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I. "al-Qaida" as a "Plastic Turkey"?

Since 9/11, the international community has been traumatized by "al-Qaida" and the "war against terrorism".

Human rights have been set aside in the interests of "national security" and the opportunity has been taken to push through legislation which would have been considered totally unacceptable under other circumstances - notably highly invasive levels of surveillance as with the total information awareness project.

At every stage, any questions have been turned aside by pointing to the threat of "al-Qaida". Requests for harder evidence concerning "al-Qaida" have been resisted with arguments that publicizing such information could further endanger "national security".

At this point it may therefore be legitimately asked whether there is any hard evidence for the existence of "al-Qaida" as the origin of the vast majority of "terrorist threats". The response is liable to be 9/11 itself and the intelligence information on the basis of which numerous suspects have been arrested under anti-terrorist legislation.

Unfortunately, none of this evidence has been successfully tested under due legal process. In fact, those accused of links to "al-Qaida" tend to be confined *incommunicado* under extra-judicial provisions in places like Guantanamo Bay.

The world is asked to trust in the leaders of the Coalition of the Willing, and specifically George Bush and Tony Blair. Unfortunately, it is precisely these two who called for similar trust in relation to their confirmed knowledge of the existence of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq - having disparaged the ability of the UN inspectors to locate such weapons.

How probable is it that "al-Qaida" is a "plastic turkey"? George Bush established his style for all time by seeking photo opportunities worldwide for his daring under-cover trip to Baghdad airport to share Thanksgiving dinner with his troops. A turkey figured prominently as evidence of his caring and sharing. Not only did the troops get none of it, it was in fact made of plastic - a studio prop to make a political point. As noted by Michael Moore (*Turkeys on the Moon*): "The fake honey glaze on that bird wasn't much different from the fake honey glaze that covers this war. And the fake stuffing in the fake bird was just the right symbol for our country during these times". (see also [Bush's turkey in Iraq images was for show, not for eating](#); [Bush's turkey raises questions](#), [Bush's turkey was only for show](#), [Scandal!! Bush's Turkey A Scam!!](#), [Stuffed by a plastic turkey](#)) [more]

Given this approach to news management, is it not highly probable that "al-Qaida" is being used in a similar manner? "Facts" as disseminated by the powerful are now "plastic" -- and only for "consumption" by the unwise. Hyperbole has become the conceptual fast food of the 21st century.

It is useful to distinguish the varieties of "al-Qaida" that may have been deliberately confused for the political purposes of George Bush and Tony Blair:

1. **As early training camps:** it appears to be the case that there have been training camps with which the name of "al-Qaida" has been associated. But training camps for "freedom fighters" and "terrorists" have existed for decades in many countries - some have been funded and staffed by the USA, notably in Central America.
2. **As fund recipients:** It appears that Osama bin Laden received funds from the USA in the 1990s as part of the geopolitical struggle in the area of Afghanistan. Such funds may have been channeled into training camps and other activities associated in some way with the term "al-Qaida".

3. **As a movement:** It appears that the term "al-Qaida" has been associated with a movement of opinion and ideas - even a set of principles and a strategy - in opposition to certain forces in the Middle East. It is however unclear how precisely this movement of opinion informed an operating group as opposed to standing as an ideal for one or more such groups.
4. **As a network:** It appears that a network of individuals, acting secretly, has developed to undertake actions inspired by those of the aforementioned movement of opinion. The name "al-Qaida" has been given to this network by various parties - although it is not clear to what degree the label corresponds to the underlying reality of that network. Indeed that network may well be very loosely connected -- to the point of lacking significant coherence warranting a common label of "al-Qaida". Different parts may have different levels of engagement of respect for guiding principles that may be shared and interpreted in a variety of ways - as with any belief system, including many religions.
5. **As "freedom fighters":** Many in the Arab world would no doubt choose to perceive "al-Qaida" as "freedom fighters", perhaps engaged in a holy war. Although "freedom fighters" have been at the origin of many independence movements -- including that of the USA -- exactly what constitutes a "freedom fighter", and how this is distinct from a "terrorist", has not been clearly and unambiguously determined.
6. **As "terrorists":** It appears that some groups do make use of arms, explosives and other means to attack people and property - as in the case of the World Trade Center -- with the prime purpose of maximizing terror. However, whilst it is clear that such groups may be inspired by belief in "al-Qaida", it remains unclear to what extent they are actually following a strategy directed and conducted by "al-Qaida". As individuals those involved may indeed have attended training camps associated by others with "al-Qaida". They may indeed have been able to obtain arms and assistance from sympathizers claiming association with "al-Qaida". But it is unclear to what degree it is meaningful to attach the term "al-Qaida" to them.
7. **As surrogates:** Given the climate of the times, it is also possible that other groups-unassociated with any of the above-may choose to conduct terrorist acts for their own purposes and claim to be doing so in the name of "al-Qaida" as a convenient cover. This is a common feature of many belief systems and religions.
8. **As "black flag" operations:** A particular form of surrogate activity would be the case of if a (rogue) agency of some interested government undertook terrorist acts (or organized others to do so) so as to benefit from the destabilization. It would be only natural for such an agency to ensure that such activity were labeled as the work of "al-Qaida".
9. **As a continuing media story:** The diversity of possibilities indicated above does not make for a good news story in comparison with the excitement of a "good guy, bad guy" scenario. Impatient media could quickly be tempted to label any violent act as the work of "terrorists" - assuming readily that all such terrorists were operating within an "al-Qaida" network". Increasing the media is free to make such judgments prior to any trial or evaluation of such evidence. The word "allegedly" no longer precedes such associations.
10. **As a premature legal judgement:** Given the manner in which due process has been usurped by anti-terrorist measures, even the highest legal authorities are drawn into attaching the label "al-Qaida" to those detained under suspicion of terrorist activity or intent -- as a means of justifying their actions. Even the UK Home Secretary has been criticized for contempt of court in passing judgment prematurely regarding "al-Qaida" suspects in anticipation of the due process for which he is responsible [[more](#)].
11. **As a video communicator:** The most obvious manifestation of "al-Qaida" - as distinct from horrendous destruction of undetermined origin - is that of the succession of videotapes purported made by Osama bin Laden as the leader of "al-Qaida". Many questions have been asked regarding the authenticity of such tapes, whose contents could be readily faked by a variety of interested parties. Whether or not they derive from Osama bin Laden, the question remains as to what connection they have with the coherent strategy of a coherent network that can be meaningfully labeled "al-Qaida".

"Plastic Turkey": All the above suggest the possibility that whilst there may be a variety of beliefs, initiatives and people that may be termed "al-Qaida" by some for whatever reason, there is some probability that what is so neatly presented as justification for the "war against terrorism" might be better described as a "plastic turkey" presented as a kind of photo opportunity by the world's superpower - as a means of advancing its own agenda.

II. Looks like Saddam, then Saddam it is -- a "Plastic Turkey"?!

It has been amazing to follow the many news reports of "Saddam Hussein". Initially not one appeared to have reported on the verification of the identity of the individual arrested as "Saddam Hussein" and removed for lengthy interrogation -- and such information has not been widely disseminated in continuing to assume that the former dictator has indeed been arrested. And yet some are already arguing that the "Saddam Hussein" that was "found" had long been a prisoner [[more](#)].

Cheryl Seal (*The Capture of Saddam: The Questions the Media Are (as Usual) Failing to Ask*, 15 dec 2003) writes: "When the 'Saddam Capture' story broke, a survey of several mainstream news outlets makes it clear: The corporate media in the US and UK, were conveniently supplied with a package similar to a press kit that included video footage, still shots, press releases worded in such a way they could be cut and pasted in the news section or read on air...."

It may be reasonably probable that the individual is Saddam Hussein. But it is also quite possible that he is not. Is there no concern that there has been an immediate assumption worldwide that it is the former dictator that had been arrested - with no reference whatsoever to

any verifying evidence? Was it not reasonable to assume that George Bush's Thanksgiving turkey was a genuine turkey - given the moral authority of the leader of the Coalition of the Willing? Why would he lie?

Under other circumstances, such an immediate assumption would have the flavour of "lynch mob" psychology. The dynamics of the arrest could be seen as playing to the crowd - as with the recent arrest of Michael Jackson, where that term has been applied.

At a time when every major crime leads to numerous fake claims of responsibility by individuals seeking notoriety, is there no case for expressing caution or presenting the evidence for correct identification? Or is such evidence now only presented at a formal trial?

Given a credible context, is it sufficient for a soldier to state "*We have someone who fits the description*" and for the person to state "*I am Saddam Hussein. I am the President of Iraq and I am willing to negotiate*". On this basis do the intelligence services then believe it to be so -- and so report to their superiors and to the media? Could anyone get a loan from a bank with such a declaration, hire a motor vehicle -- or perform a surgical operation? Is there no concern that the pressures on the American military to make such an arrest may have encouraged them to ignore any adequate process of verification? Would this not be a classic example of group think.?

It was widely reported that "Saddam Hussein's" paranoia had resulted in the identification and training of at least three doubles or look-alikes - to stand in for him in a variety of circumstances, especially where there was some vulnerability to assassination (see [The Many Faces of Saddam Hussein](#) [more | more]). What happened to these doubles? Is there not the faintest possibility that it was one of the doubles that was caught? [more]

What happened to the DNA tests that were envisaged to guard against any such mistake? [more] Who can confirm that any such tests were not themselves faked in some way? Why are questions being raised concerning the unusual rapidity of obtaining test results (7 hours) when such testing normally requires 3-5 days? [more | more | more | more]. And as Cheryl Seal queries: "If the man in custody is not Saddam, but a double, then who is to say that the Pentagon didn't just take two blood samples from the same man the same day? The results would, of course, show that this was the same man. But that the man is Saddam would be a question that remains unanswered, esp. as this very paranoid man was known to have a stable full of convincing doubles."

Given the manner in which the Coalition of the Willing so willingly affirmed for so long that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction in Iraq -- finally to be embarrassed to the highest degree -- is it not possible that they may end up being embarrassed that they have caught the wrong "turkey"? Whether the probability is low, surely precaution is appropriate in all such matters.

But then in the *Plastic Turkey Era*, is it not possible that matters have been "arranged" to arrest "Saddam Hussein"? Certainly the USA would have every motivation for doing so - with enthusiasm that could only be matched by "finding" the much-sought "weapons of mass destruction", especially if "Saddam Hussein" can now point them to a stash of WMD (possibly carefully prepared over months for that "revelation"). But then would not the real Saddam Hussein have every reason to want a "Saddam Hussein" to be arrested - with or without the complicity of the USA - so that he could enjoy a secure retirement? And then there are the relatives and colleagues of the dictator. Given the \$25 million reward offered by the USA, would not any of them be prepared to swear that "Saddam Hussein" was indeed the person that has been found? How is the veracity of any such statement to be confirmed.

Again, according to Cheryl Seal: "Never in its existence has the Bush administration given itself a better opportunity to fabricate evidence - and it has given itself PLENTY of such opportunities. Every interrogation session made of 'Saddam' should be videotaped. Not only that, but conducted with independent observers present - as in people NOT part of the Bush machine.... Transcripts of the sessions should be reviewed by these independent observers. Any "statements", [more]

Unfortunately in the current *Plastic Turkey Era*, it will be extremely difficult for the USA to present evidence that would be independently considered as the confirmation of the identity of the former dictator. When the activities of the intelligence community have been politicized to the degree demonstrated by the search for WMD, how can those responsible prove that they are not simply engaging in a frame-up? The decades of speculation concerning the Kennedy assassination point towards the challenges of assessing the realities underlying the arrest, trial and execution of "Saddam Hussein".

Of course, it might be claimed that "Saddam Hussein" himself will be happy to sign documents confirming his identity. The problem is that anyone would be happy to sign in that way after the months of beatings, drugs and electrical persuasion to be provided by the US interrogation forces - until he is "ready to talk cooperatively". Indeed with the new techniques of [false memory implantation](#), anyone so treated would be more than convinced that he was "Saddam Hussein" - even George Bush himself!

III. Assassinating "Plastic Turkeys"

Much has been made of the rapid legitimization of assassination and "targeted killings" in response to the threat of terrorism.

This is especially significant in a country like the USA where the issue of human rights and due process has long set a legal and moral standard precluding such actions [more]. However, it is also clear that presidential executive orders have long permitted such actions as cover operations by the security forces, despite being specifically renounced under the Reagan administration [more | more | more | more].

The new situation is the manner in which assassination is now considered acceptable and even necessary -- under the euphemism "targeted killings" as developed by Israel [more]. It is somewhat reassuring regarding the possible past use of assassination that US special forces and SWAT teams were deemed so ill-trained for such a mission that Israeli assassins were brought in to train them [more | more]. Assassination is no longer considered as a covert operation [more | more | more | more]. Both the Clinton and Bush administration have backed targeted killings. In a classified 1998 intelligence finding, President Clinton authorized the CIA to use covert lethal force against Osama bin Laden and his deputies. President Bush issued another intelligence finding, this one giving the CIA permission to use lethal force against a wider class of al-Qaida personnel [more].

The question is how the target is selected and "acquired", notably by an occupying force.

The "rules of engagement" with which occupying forces encounter people in Iraq offer many degrees of freedom [[more](#) | [more](#)]. Individuals may be freely shot in Iraq. Any questions regarding this process are simply met with the response that the person was "acting suspiciously" or "resisted arrest". No proof is required. What proof could be given -- and to whom? Judgement on these matters is left to the person killing people on the ground in this way. There is no appeal -- as is evident in cases where wedding parties and children have been bombed and killed in fire fights. The action is provided with justifications even in such extreme cases.

Such assassination, whether deliberate or mistaken, offers further insights into the characteristics of the *Plastic Turkey Era*. Essentially a person of a different culture can be arbitrarily defined as "suspicious" in the eyes of a foreign military unit unfamiliar with that culture -- and present there as an occupying force. Once defined as suspicious to their own satisfaction, they may be freely killed by making further assumptions concerning the degree of threat represented by their activity. Once shot this action can be readily justified by assertion of the "fact" that the person was a "terrorist" -- without any challenge to that assumption.

The question of what relation the dead person had to "terrorism" or "al-Qaida" or to "Saddam Hussein" is essentially irrelevant. In the *Plastic Turkey Era* the assassin embodies the complete cycle of the judicial process. The assassin acts as detective, judge and jury -- and executioner -- framing the evidence to suit his case, and then applying the death penalty. There is necessarily no court of appeal and the soldier's action is subsequently fully covered by the military hierarchy.

IV. Religious "Plastic Turkeys" -- Hermes vs the Hijab

France is in the throes of a heated debate regarding the wearing of headscarves (the *Hijab*) by Muslim girls in educational institutions. President Chirac is calling for legislation banning the Islamic headscarf and other conspicuous religious signs (including Christian crosses and Jewish skullcaps) from state schools -- although "discreet signs" are to be permitted (see *Secularism Gone Mad*, 18 Dec 2003). This concern is evident to a lesser degree in other countries with an increasing proportion of Muslims. Chirac's announcement was accompanied by a call for a strong reinforcement of secularism throughout the public service. Chirac indicated that his conscience had persuaded him that "clothing and signs which conspicuously show membership of a religion must be forbidden in schools" [[more](#) | [more](#)]

In the case of head covering, no questions are raised about the acceptability of scarves such as those of *Hermes*TM. The irony is that whilst the *Hijab* is a modern religious symbol, "Hermes" is the name of a god in the ancient Greek pantheon -- he is the "messenger of the gods", also the "god of the road" and the "god of commerce". The scarf benefits from the association with the "spiritual" qualities of the deity in that pantheon. Why else would the name have been selected and trade marked for marketing purposes?

It is claimed that the move by the French authorities is against the wearing of the *Hijab* in "secular" institutions. This raises the question as to the significance and boundaries of "secular". It may be convenient to recognize certain belief systems as "religions" and to prohibit the wearing of their symbols. However it is possible that there are other belief systems that are functionally equivalent to religions but are not so recognized, for example the belief systems of the Druids or Wiccans - or even that of some secret society or animist cult. Who would recognize the symbols of a secret cult and the clothing they prescribe?

Much more relevant to the framing of the focus on the *Hijab* is the extent to which corporations -- like *Hermes* -- seek to market clothing products through the use of symbols that carry spiritual and religious significance, whether or not they would claim to be doing this intentionally. Nothing would be more pleasing to such a company if it could transform "customers" into "believers" in a system of values intimately associated with its products -- as with an old advertisement "Buy a Buick -- Something to Believe in".

To what extent is the pattern of belief in their products -- cultivated by corporations in young people -- to be considered as distinct in practice from a cult or a religion? In a "secular" society, would young people attach greater "spiritual" significance to a conventional religious symbol or to one which had been skillfully cultivated by marketing agencies -- to position a scarf or a brand of footwear? Few in the design world would challenge that fashion can be understood and lived as a religion -- or as a substitute for a religion. Much has been made of the obsession of school children with wearing designer clothes in ways which might readily be understood as substituting for religious beliefs -- clothes, defining a "look", may indeed become a religion [[more](#) | [more](#) | [more](#)].

Much has been reported on the importance of designer labels in establishing the status of the wearer -- through "the look" -- within the context of a belief system. People have been mugged and killed for designer label shoes. To what degree should the *Hijab* be seen as a designer label scarf -- which the designers of competing scarves perceive as encroaching dangerously on the marketing of their belief system?

To what extent does wearing a *Hermes* scarf signal a curious form of revival of the religion of ancient Greece -- or an appropriation of that religion, as with Christianity's appropriation of pagan deities and rites in other contexts? [[more](#) | [more](#)]

It would be instructive to explore what other deities have been coopted and cultivated as a focus for belief in corporate products. For example: *Poseidon* (baseball cap), *Erebus* (down jacket), *Nyx* (sunglasses), *Agalaidia* (garments), *Thalia* (pants), *Aphrodite* (clothing), etc..... **Have any deities not been used in this way?** Even Nike derives from the ancient Greek cult of *Athena Nike*!

European Implication of Worship of Pagan Religions

There is a resurgence of interest in Greece, and elsewhere, in the classical Hellenic religions as part of the Ellinon Epistroti, or "Return to Hellenes Movement." In June 2004, the World Council of Ethnic Religions (WCER) had its seventh congress in Greece. It was hosted by the Greek pagan umbrella group *Ypato Symboulia Hellenon Ethnikon* (YSEE). This includes the *Committee for the Hellenic Religion*. (J. S. Parker, *Ongoing Persecution of Pagans in Modern Greece*, 2006). There are twelve gods (and goddesses) in the Hellenic Olympian Religion of the *Dodekathion*: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Ares, Hermes, Hephaestus, Aphrodite, Athena, Apollo, and Artemis are always considered Olympians. Hebe, Helios, Hestia, Demeter, Dionysus,

Hades, and Persephone are the variable gods among the Twelve.

As members of the European Union and subject to European human rights legislation, France and Greece are called upon to recognize the worship of religions of either country. Formal recognition for worship of the Dodekathion is being sought [more]. Presumably the restrictions on wearing religious symbols in France should therefore apply to the symbols associated with worship of the Olympians -- and to the misappropriation of such symbols. To what extent should the French be concerned at the imminent possibility of restrictions of the wearing of Hermes scarves or the shoes of Nike (as an aspect of Athena)? To what extent are the names of such deities to be considered as having been misappropriated -- especially in the light of recent Europe-wide demonstrations against blasphemous misrepresentation?

This points to a curious twist in the corporate strategy of globalization -- and its possible dependence on values articulated by deities that apparently still constitute a psychically active residue in the modern consciousness (perhaps mnemonically through the sound values of the names of such deities). Is there some unconscious need to reactivate symbolic dimensions articulated in ancient civilizations by their deities -- but to transform and lock that expression into the context of the universal rule of commerce as a universal religion? Whereas deities of the past were worshipped in temples, are they now to be worshipped in "secular" shopping malls as temples of commerce? A universal religion with franchise shops as the agents of God as the ultimate manufacturer? Are consumers dressed in the Hermes "look" or in the Christian Dior "look", for example, to be understood as uniformed celebrants of a resurgent religion? This would help explain the US enthusiasm for implanting their franchise outlets in countries they occupy -- the "clash of civilizations" is indeed then a clash of religions.

More generally is it the case that young people are in the process of choosing and cultivating -- with the complicity of the media world and governments -- the entities in a vast new pantheon that is being used to articulate their values? The "divinities" in this pantheon include the media stars, celebrities and singers in which many young people -- especially in a "secular" society -- believe to a far greater degree than in the spiritual leaders of any religion. Compare the role and visibility of ancient deities in their societies with that in contemporary society of Madonna, Kylie Minogue, Michael Jackson, Arnold Schwarzenegger, etc -- as [A-List Celebrities](#) -- the new Gods of Olympus?

Veils, Hijabs and Niqabs vs Sunglasses, Hoods and Nudity?

Former UK Foreign Secretary, [Jack Straw](#), has provoked controversy by advocating that Muslim women should remove their veils, especially the *niqab* (full veil). He argues that the increasing trend towards covering facial features was 'bound to make better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult' because face-to-face conversations were of 'greater value' [more more].

No comparison was made with an earlier European fashion favouring veils, or any future fashion trend in favour of veils or face-covering scarves. Should sunglasses be condemned for the same reasons -- with hoods and balaclavas? Do they too constitute a dangerous "symbol of separation"? What then is to be said about communications with authorities and services that are only possible by telephone? Do they make relations "more difficult? Would removing more items of clothing make for better communication -- beyond showing a deep cleavage? Would this be consistent with the philosophy of nudists? Should politicians meet their constituencies in the nude to reduce the democratic deficit? Would nudity improve the quality of parliamentary debate?

Curiously there is no requirement in the *Qur'an* that women be veiled, rather it is in the *Bible* that Christian women are enjoined to be "covered". Should Jack Straw's preferences apply to devout Christians if they choose fully to respect the word of the *Bible*:

*For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn:
but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven,
let her be veiled. (Corinthians I, 11:6)*

The most fruitful review of the complexity of the veiling issue, from a historical perspective, is provided by a former Catholic nun, Karen Armstrong (*My years in a habit taught me the paradox of veiling*, *Guardian*, 26 October 2006)

In the *Plastic Turkey Era* it is clear that the focus on prohibiting the *Hijab* may well be a subterfuge in favour of other emergent "religions" -- or their spiritual surrogates. As with "al-Qaida" and "Saddam Hussein", the significance of the *Hijab* is in process of being manipulated for political ends -- whatever the fundamental truths with which it may be associated. As with the case of "assassination" (discussed above), it here takes the form of cultural assassination -- with the emphasis on "cult". The prohibitive focus of a French society -- so identified with other "looks" -- on the *Hijab* is a form of "targeted killing" within a complex cult-ural ecosystem. The symbolism of the *Hijab* can be fruitfully considered as subject to manipulation in a highly competitive symbolic environment -- as part of a process of [memetic warfare](#).

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