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"Shock and Awe": Guernica Revisited

By [Gar Smith](#), [AlterNet](#)

January 27, 2003

Forget Osama. Forget Saddam. The Pentagon's newest target is the city of Baghdad.

US military strategists have announced a plan to pummel the Iraqi capital with as many as 800 cruise missiles in the space of two days. If George W. Bush gets the war he wants, Baghdad could become the 21st Century's Guernica.

On April 26, 1937, 25 Nazi bombers dropped 100,000 pounds of bombs and incendiaries on the peaceful Basque village. Seventy percent of the town was destroyed and 1,500 people, a third of the population, were killed.

The Pentagon now predicts that its Baghdad blitzkrieg could approximate the devastation of a nuclear explosion. "The sheer size of this has never been... contemplated before," one Pentagon strategist boasted to CBS News. "There will not be a safe place in Baghdad," a city of 5 million people.

The Pentagon dubbed its cold-blooded attack plan "Shock and Awe" – a bizarre conjunction of trauma and admiration. Shock and awe were the very emotions that Americans experienced on Sept. 11, 2001. Now, like the 9/11 terrorists, Bush and Co. are planning a similar act of almost unparalleled ferocity – a devastating premeditated attack on a civilian urban population.

Bush seems determined to follow in the footsteps of Hulagu Khan and Tamerlane, the Mongol warlords who laid bloody waste to Baghdad in 1258 and 1401.

But destroying Baghdad will not uncover hidden chemical, biological or nuclear weapons (if, in fact, any exist). Destroying Baghdad will not capture, topple or kill Saddam Hussein. Shock and Awe's expressed goal is simple: to destroy the Iraqi people "physically, emotionally and psychologically."

Ironically, this was also the goal of the Nazi strategists who destroyed Guernica. The town had no strategic value as a military target, but – like Baghdad – it was a cultural and religious center. Guernica was devastated to terrorize the population and break the spirit of the Basque resistance.

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Surely cruise missiles have been programmed to demolish the Baath Party Headquarters, presidential palaces and Republican Guard compounds. But have missiles also been preset to obliterate the al-Qadiriya Shrine, the Tomb of Imam al-A'dham and the Mosque of Sheik Abdul Qadir al-Ghailani?

We now know that there was no military need to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The detonations were intended to demonstrate to the world – and to the Soviet Union, especially – that the US had a functioning superweapon. Having sole possession of "The Bomb" gave Washington the power to dominate post-war world politics.

Similarly, the destruction of Baghdad seems designed to underscore Bush's belligerent warning to the rest of the world: "You're either with us or you're against us."

Washington's new National Security Strategy describes an America dominating the world militarily, politically and economically.

In a report published a month before the US presidential elections, the conservative Project for the New American Century insisted on instituting a "global US pre-eminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests."

This ringing endorsement of hyper-imperialism was co-authored by Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis Libby and Jeb Bush – none of whom ever volunteered for military service.

Today, thousands of citizen volunteers from around the world are converging in Iraq to stand as nonviolent "human shields" in hopes of forestalling a US assault. The brave men and women in this international "Peace Army" include anti-war activists, religious witnesses, retirees, US military veterans and members of families who lost loved ones in the September 11 attack.

Mr. Bush repeatedly complains that Saddam Hussein deserves to be removed from office because "he killed his own people."

If Mr. Bush fails to promptly courtmartial the officials who came up with the Shock and Awe atrocity, he may soon find himself standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Mr. Hussein and facing history's judgement as another ruthless leader who "killed his own people" in a mad bid for power.

Gar Smith, former editor of the Earth Island Journal, now produces [The-Edge](#), a weekly online environmental newsmagazine.

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Apr 17, 2002

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