



Hollywood Shuffle. In La-la Land, carbon emissions are a threat, terrorists are not

(Published in *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 1, 2007)

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Colaboraciones n° 1541

March 7, 2007

How curious that at the Academy Awards ceremony last weekend not a word was said about the terrorist movements dedicated to the destruction of the West.

Hollywood stars and moguls don't appear to fully grasp that such groups as al-Qaeda and such regimes as that ruling Iran not only hate Republicans, evangelicals and Richard Perle. They also hope to suppress artistic freedom, impose second-class status on women, and stone to death those with unconventional sexual orientations.

Should that really be of less of concern to Hollywood than global warming?

Movies are made to entertain and turn a profit, but they can shape public opinion as well. Some filmmakers aim to advance an ideology. Think what Sergei Eisenstein did for Soviet communism, or what Leni Riefenstahl did for the Nazis. (Michael Moore is not in their league, though he may aspire to be.)

At the Academy Awards presentation 40 years ago, *The Battle of Algiers* was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film. It already had won several prestigious awards in Europe. In recent years, its relevance to the conflicts being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan has brought about something of a revival. It has even been screened at the Pentagon.

If you watched this year's Oscars, you saw, in a montage of recently departed cinema greats, a photo of Gillo Pontecorvo, the director of *The Battle of Algiers*, who died last year at 87. An Italian-born former Communist, Pontecorvo was commissioned to make the movie by veterans of Algeria's struggle for independence from France. To tell their story, Pontecorvo focused on a battle the French won in 1957, in a war the French would lose in 1962.

The film makes a strong case that terrorism is a legitimate weapon when wielded in pursuit of a just cause. The film leaves no doubt regarding who has a just cause: The Algerians want their freedom. The French want to occupy Algeria, to rule and exploit its Muslim population.

At one point in the film, a French journalist asks the revolutionary leader, Ben M'Hidi, about his terrorist tactics: "Don't you think it's a bit cowardly to use women's baskets and handbags to carry explosive devices that kill so many innocent people?"

Ben M'Hidi replies: "And doesn't it seem to you even more cowardly to drop napalm bombs on defenseless villages, so that there are a thousand times more innocent victims? Of course, if we had your airplanes it would be a lot easier for us. Give us your bombers, and you can have our baskets."

The Battle of Algiers was to inspire such disparate revolutionaries of the '60s and '70s as the Irish Republican

Army, the Black Panthers and the Palestine Liberation Organization (founded by the Arab League in 1964). In the years since, the logic of Pontecorvo/Ben M'Hidi has been appropriated by almost every self-styled revolutionary terrorist, from Ayatollah Khomeini to Osama bin Laden. It echoes in the West as well, not least on campuses and in the media, for example in Reuters' facile formulation that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter."

Or, as a former U.S. Ambassador and member of the "expert advisory group" to the Baker/Hamilton commission recently phrased it: "People are just as dead when bombed from the air, shot with a tank round, culled with a sniper shot, or stabbed in a bayonet charge as they are when killed by a suicide bomber or a roadside bomb."

If that is the standard, one might as well also say that people are just as dead when killed on a battlefield or poisoned in a gas chamber, so what's the difference and who are we to judge?

Nor, to some sophisticates, does it matter whether the cause is to maintain a colony, as it was for the French in Algeria, or to help stand up a decent government and get out - the mission of American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the revolutionaries against whom America fights openly seek to establish totalitarian rule.

So whose cause is just and who -- if anyone -- should be given more lati-

tude when it comes to weapons and tactics? What sense does it make to argue that we are bound by the strictest interpretation of the rules of warfare, but that we should not demand even minimal restraints from our enemies?

These are not easy questions to answer. Maybe that's why Hollywood would rather worry about carbon emissions and whether the glaciers of Greenland are melting.

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