

Armchair Spartans and the 'D' Word

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In a reluctantly given news conference in April 2004, one year after the invasion of Iraq, George W. Bush finally got around to saying the 'D' word: "The consequence of failure in Iraq would be unthinkable. Every friend of America and Iraq would be betrayed to prison and murder as a new tyranny arose. Every enemy of America and the world would celebrate, proclaiming our weakness and *decadence*, and using that victory to recruit a new generation of killers."

The same year in Basra, Tony Blair declared: "We British are not a nation of quitters." Both stuck their pre-invasion rhetoric with the frequent use of 'appeasement' to describe and belittle their own citizen's opposition to the invasion.

Decadence, the nagging psychic fear of it and the accompanying metaphors of 'softness' in contrast to 'resolve', is a language of various fundamentalisms, and more significantly of empires and their elites. In a typical piece of knockabout, the writer Celine saw the introduction of the icecube as spelling the end of colonialism. More seriously Ibn Khaldoun, the 14th century Arab sociologist born into an elite Tunisian family, described a pattern whereby dynasties lasted just three generations. The first held to the tough life of the countryside, but by the third it had been softened by the commodities of urban life and become incapable of defending itself against a new rural dynasty. Recently, it is the Anglo-Saxon world of Australia, the USA and Britain which has taken upon itself the role of being tough and resolute (the adjectives are many) defenders of Western civilisation: Edward Said's 'stern white men', or the Anglo-Saxon 'posse' as Samuel Huntington calls it.

Their elites see themselves in this light both militarily and in their model of fundamentalist capitalism, which calls itself neo-liberalism but which speaks the language of social Darwinism. The irony — if that is what it is — is that what such champions of the resolute are defending is also instrumental in creating the very 'softness' it perceives in its own citizens; a successful Western consumer capitalism which challenges individual self-restraint and willpower on a daily basis. My purpose here is to confront the decadence rhetoric of these elites, and the victim-blame, techno-fantasy and outsourcing of contradictions which it uses.

"The Military Definition of Reality"

In *The Power Elite* (1956), C. Wright Mills' gives a prescient and detailed description of the USA's military-industrial complex, a revolving door between the elites of the military, politics, and corporate capitalism. He talks there of this "military definition of reality". Best known for his grandiosely titled *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993), a work of windy generalisation, in 1957 Samuel Huntington produced his first book, *The Soldier and the State*. It concluded with a eulogy of West Point, the USA's elite military academy: "West Point is a grey island in a many coloured sea, a bit of Sparta in the midst of Babylon. Yet is it possible to deny that the military values — loyalty, duty, restraint, dedication — are the ones America needs most today. That the disciplined order of West Point has more to offer than the garish individualism of Main Street."

Tell that to WalMart and Wall Street — but

they are what West Point is there to defend against all-comers! Yet Huntington does not wish to see the fat money in the military-industrial complex, so he looks elsewhere to impose discipline on garish individualism. His support for the Iraq invasion and the virtues of the 'stern white man' in a dangerous world of 'failed states' meshes with a long-term dislike of any form of democracy that does anything for the poor who, in the face of all the evidence, are perceived to be too comfortable on welfare money.

In the 1960s, a government hawk on Vietnam and adversary of the new counter-culture, Huntington contributed a large essay to a book called *The Crisis of Democracy*. There was too much of it, that was the crisis. The 1960s had this kind of effect on armchair Spartans and elder neocons like Irving Kristol who, like Ibn Khaldoun, saw religion as the essential social glue to combat decadence. For them, or for Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, the 1960s was when western decadence set in; a 'double-whammy' of the counter-culture and a confident, hedonistic, working class asking for more. Michael Kalecki could not have anticipated the counter-culture, but in his famous 1944 essay, 'Economics of Full Employment', he understood clearly that discipline was more important to capital than immediate profitability, that a confident working class was intolerable to the elite. A government man and armchair Spartan like Huntington is always preoccupied with discipline, arguing that "Democracy is only one way of constituting authority, and it is not necessarily a universally applicable one. In many situations the claim of expertise, seniority, experience and special talents may override the claims of democracy as a means of constituting authority." This is bog-standard elitism in which what is a 'special talent' is determined by a small world which monopolises what constitutes a special talent, and who has it. But the real thrust of his attack on the democratic impulse of the 1960s is that it increased government spending while reducing its authority.

When it comes to government spending, he does not mention the costs of the Vietnam War which he strongly supported, a war which undermined the Great Society social reforms project both politically and economically. No, Huntington — unlike other social-democrat warmongers like W.W.Rostow — blames the Great Society project itself, and picks on the usual suspects, like public sector unionisation and welfare payments. In typically brazen style he wrote, "a government which lacks authority and which is committed to substantial domestic programmes will have little ability, short of a cataclysmic crisis, to impose on its people the sacrifices which may be necessary to deal with foreign policy problems and defence." This when the Vietnam War budget was at its height.

Huntington is a member of the American Enterprise Institute's 'Council of Academic Advisers'. This particular Institution of Assertion, is one of many well financed, non-academically reviewed 'think tanks' (as if thinking itself were now an elite specialisation), which have become an integral part of right wing US politics. It is particularly concerned about too many people being born in wrong parts of the world, and the demographic decline of the 'stern white man'. For Huntington, "Muslim population growth is a



destabilising force,” while Westerners constitute, “a steadily decreasing minority of the world’s population.” Another ‘academic fellow’, Ben Wattenburg talks of how “The West has been the driving force of modern civilisation, inexorably pushing towards democratic values. Will that continue when its share of the total [global] population is only 11 %?”

The Institute also boasts the ‘underclass’ ideologues Robert Bork and Charles Murray. Bork’s *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* is a diatribe against the rise not just of decadence but of a *degeneracy*, with clearly racist overtones. (It provides an instance where for once satire has a cutting edge, where these people were anticipated as the Knights Templar of Ishmael Reed’s novel *Mumbo-Jumbo*.) Murray’s work of correlating race and intelligence has been comprehensively trashed by serious scholars, but you can’t keep these people down. In an article in *The Sunday Times* (3/4/05) he urges Britain to give up on social programmes for the ‘underclass’, and asks instead if Britain is willing to pay the price of a 250,000 prison population, a per capita equivalent to the US Gulag. Unfortunately for Murray the vestiges of a welfare state, still extant in the US as well as Britain, “by its nature generates large numbers of feckless people,” and “Feckless men...” are crucially “unable to get up at the same time every morning.” No doubt they are also those who were late in getting out of New Orleans when the dams broke. Underclass ideology is now creeping into mainstream British politics, and it makes one wonder who Tony Blair’s ‘we’ is, the we who “are not quitters.” It is an ideology also in the service of denial. Its talkers cannot bring themselves to blame this relative shrinking of the Western world’s demography on the success of consumer capitalism. So instead all their subliminal fear and resentment is aimed not just at too many Palestinians being born, but that too many children born within the Western world are born to the wrong sort of people, to feckless people who are quite likely not to be 100% white.

Fat and Frugality

The language of decadence and not-decadence appears frequently in what is written about food and diet. The poor are usually the target of the moralism that goes with much of what is said about obesity: the moralism of the lean, trim, masters of the universe, the Darwinian ‘fittest’. It is true that, as Greg Critser says, “Poverty is a lonely place and cheap food is a natural balm against it,” and it is in the Anglo-Saxon heartlands that obesity levels are highest. It is also there that we find the greatest income inequalities, which exploded during the same period as the emergence of obesity on its present scale. As obesity and inequality continue to rise in tandem, fat has become an issue in the new China too.

The starting point some 25-30 years ago also coincided with a political decision to get American farmers on-side in a new ‘right wing’ voting coalition, created by the Nixon Administration against the remnants of those who had believed in and benefited from Johnson’s Great Society project. Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz set up the subsidisation of corn production (to the continuing anger of the Third World) which has kept prices down along the food chain of carbohydrates and meat. Corn also became the source of HFCS (high fructose corn syrup), six times sweeter than sugar. At around the same time, palm oil was successfully processed for frying French fries (chips) and baking cookies. It is 45 % saturated fat. Cheap food became especially unhealthy food. Reading about 1930s Britain, cheap food was always unhealthy food, but there was not so much of it to trigger conditions like type-2 diabetes that are now so clearly related to cheap corn and its derivatives which, by the rush of insulin produced, could be called addictive. In a moment of radicalism, Atkins of the Atkins diet says such unhealthy “appetites were called forth by the instruments of corporate capitalism.”

These then are material conditions rather than the decadence rhetoric which sees only personal defects. The same period has also seen the development of a diet industry on an

unprecedented scale, and this business is not primarily, if at all, aimed at the poor. It is also one that as Steven Shapin noted has changed its pitch (“The Great Neurotic Art” *London Review of Books* 5/8/04). A diet book of 1967 by Dr Irving Stillman emphasised will power: “You must develop a firm, almost fanatical desire to lose dangerous excess weight.” By contrast Shapin’s ‘democratic Atkins’ argued that, “Fighting the scale armed only with willpower and determination, works, at best for only five low-fat dieters out of a hundred.” The answer from Atkins and others like Barry Sears, is that it is ‘nutritional science’ that enables us to “bypass our need to rely on will power.” But not entirely, as a few days of willpower are required before those addictive carbohydrate cravings disappear and then “there is no longer any need for willpower, you have remade yourself.” The re-make with the help of professionals is now a general cultural staple on TV and in the ‘life narrative’ of George W. Bush. On diet, Shapin comments that “Atkins, Agatson and other ‘low-carb’ writers seek to resolve the apparent tension between, on the one hand, the idea of addiction as corroding the will and sapping resolve, and on the other, the coherence of making an appeal to fat people’s wills.” They do it by a ‘natural’ technological fix, (the hoodia plant of the Kalahari bushmen being the latest), but also in a cultural climate in which, Shapin says, there has been a “straightforward rejection of the notion that self-control is either instrumentally necessary or morally desirable.”

Consumers of Last Resort

Such a wholesale rejection of the notion of self-control and its associated virtues is blamed entirely on the 1960s counter-culture by a wide range of armchair Spartans. It is from this time that they began to attract money for their think-tanks and institutes. But their immediate political representatives softened things up in advance, terrorising a radical generation. Prisoners, students, and black activists were assassinated. A radical of a much earlier age, Wilhelm Reich died in a Federal penitentiary, but not before he had begun to popularise techniques of finding-your-inner-self. Many of the radical political generation took this up as part of their political practice, but as Adam Curtis has shown, social change via individual self-realisation became an end in itself, a rationalisation for dropping out of public politics after that had been terrorised. More cynical people then developed a series of products and marketing techniques directed at the notion of self-realisation in which there was little glimmer of self-control.

In the mid-to-late 1990s these consumers were lionised. During the East Asian financial crisis and beyond, they became ‘consumers of last resort’, heroes of the global economy, keeping it afloat, a phrase recycled by a host of heavyweights. That such a flip turnover of the traditional ‘banker of last resort’ should become common usage is revealing in itself. ‘Self-indulgence’, the absence of restraint and sacrifice, became a capitalist virtue, when the global downward pressure on wages meant too many low wage earners could not afford to buy what they produced, which as a consequence would affect profitability.

Get Thee Hence Satan

It has turned out that the consumer of last resort was also having to borrow on heroic levels. As Jeffrey Sachs put it, “Remuneration of America’s workers has not been high enough to support consumption without borrowing.” The leaders of the Anglo-Saxon ‘posse’ have turned out to be lax in the financial world: deregulation galore and lots of personal debt. In Britain the explosion of debt began under Thatcher. In the US it is at record levels. In Australia under stalwart John Howard and his fundamentalist policies, in the words of Reserve Bank Governor Ian MacFarlane, “it exceeds any reasonable benchmark by a large margin.”

In the US, the gap between static wages and increased consumption — pointed out by Jeffrey Sachs for one — was covered as in the UK and



Australia by rising house prices, but also by an almost mystical belief that the equity market was a one-way winner, and that with enough people having a stake in it, all would be well. This fantasy collapsed with the dot.com bubble and the deceit bubble of Enron and other corporations. These collapses showed up just how much of the equity purchases themselves were made with borrowed money. By then personal debt, excluding \$7 trillion of mortgage debt, had increased by 41% to \$2 trillion.

US rates of saving continued at an almost uniquely low level, and consumption on borrowed money in Britain and Australia did not slack, but from mid-2003 there began to be outbursts of self-righteousness in the British business press. A classic appeared in *The Independent* (26/08/03) from Stephen King, Managing Director of Economics at the HSBC banking conglomerate. The headline read: “Everyone likes a party but what happens when the music stops.” “The UK is consuming too much and the increase is faster than in any other country,” he wrote, “we cannot go on like this forever.” He proceeded to list the

ways in which consumers are vulnerable, like the 'outsourcing' of jobs. What is especially revealing is how he characterises the over-borrowers, making continual reference to the drinkers of 18 pints of lager, and to clubbing and sun-seeking holidaymakers in Cyprus "showing their naughty bits." Quite obviously this is not a scrupulous description of the class composition of the debt he describes. Rather, it is targeted not at the underclass but working class hedonism. Others pointed out that it might be that in all three countries house prices were all overvalued. Even the Economist, a cheerleader of fundamentalist capitalism, expressed this fear, "the global house-price boom could turn to bust" and found that "Most of the countries in the Eurozone are less addicted to debt and asset-price inflation than the Anglo-Saxon world." (2/10/04) Addicted! In saying what might be done, it was reduced to banalities which placed responsibility on the shoulders of the individual borrower.

The individual must say in so many words 'Get thee hence Satan' as the 'high street' banks urge you once again to borrow money,



and governments like Britain aim to introduce a wider scale gambling industry. Wise advice no doubt, because when the shit does hit the fan the 'consumer of last resort', the hero of yesteryear, is left to face the music alone. That it is the individual consumer who is to be punished for not showing restraint and willpower in resisting the pressures of finance and consumer capitalism is clearly visible in the Bush administration's new law on bankruptcy. This law makes it far harder for individuals to apply for Chapter 7 bankruptcy and thus face the tougher demands of Chapter 13 where debtors are put on a stringent repayment schedule in which their wages are docked for years to pay off creditors. Banks and credit card companies have spent \$24 million on political donations to get this legislation passed. It is expected that it is middle class families that will be most at risk through serious illness or losing their jobs.

Outsourcing

The possibility of losing a job is real enough. On this HSBC's Stephen King, despite his class prejudice, was honest enough. Outsourced is the word of choice for those who take away the jobs, and the threat of outsourcing also holds down wages which he noted as another factor in the increase in levels of debt. In the matter of work, and where it is done, there are yet more contradictions in the power elite's notion of decadence. Globalisation, in the sense that some production processes can be shifted to wherever the cheapest capable workforce can be found, does wonders for that discipline that Michael Kalecki understood was so important to the capitalist world and its ethos — a discipline minimally defined by Charles Murray as being able to "get up at the same time every morning." Workers often accept lower pay and worse conditions just to keep the job. At the same time there is a nagging worry within the armchair Spartan section of the elite that the process may place too much economic power elsewhere, China especially, and also that it will make its own citizens decadent in the sense of being soft, incapable of hard work, manual work, the lessening of which also occurs in analyses of obesity. As far back as 1960 John Steinbeck in *Travels with Charley* was worrying along these lines: "Just as the Carthaginians hired mercenaries to do their fighting for them, we Americans bring in mercenaries to do our hard and humble work ... I hope we may not be overwhelmed one day by peoples not too proud or lazy or too soft to bend to the earth and pick up the things we eat." But it is precisely this 'bending to the earth' that is the overwhelming task of immigrant labour in Britain. The rich world also does not want to give up entirely on certain low-tech industrial processes, either agriculture or plastics moulding, because it does not want to face a monopoly on low wage work elsewhere. Contesting this monopoly requires immigrant workers under constant pressure from 'immigration politics' with a knock-on effect on domestic wages in general.

To the world at large, however, the macho American work culture of long hours (Britain is the closest in Europe, just as it is the most 'flexible', i.e. unregulated) is proclaimed as what makes these countries 'not-decadent'. In yet another sleight of hand, decadence is defined by the power elite as not working long hours. France and its 35 hour week is the handy punchbag. The ghastly Thomas Friedman writes of "a world of benefits they [Western Europeans] have known for 50 years is coming apart." This is because they, the French especially, "are trying to preserve a 35 hour work week in a world where Indian engineers are ready to work a 35 hour day." The hyperbole alone — "a 35 hour day"? — should be warning enough, never mind the smug racism. He concludes that "it's a bad time for France to lose their appetite for hard work." Meanwhile in Britain, New Labour makes it a point of principle to opt out from the 48 hour working time directive. This macho work culture has produced its own set of anxieties, where teenagers and parentry are shunted off into a parallel world of outsourced makeover fat-kid boot camps.

The realistic assumption, given the inequalities

of the Anglo-Saxon world and the strategies that perpetuate it, is that only a part of the non-immigrant population, let alone the immigrant one, will have 'standards of excellence' in economically efficient professions. Any rhetoric to the contrary is simply deceptive. It is quite visible in the relentless process of US white-collar jobs that are being exported to East Asia and other parts of the developing world. As noted above, only some manufacturing process plant can be easily moved around the globe. Such blockages do not arise with hardware and software computer design or financial services, not since the advent of economically viable telecommunications networks. Once the telecoms blockage had gone no restraint has been shown. Saying that this is a problem only for France and other 'lazy' West Europeans is, once again, simply to ride over the contradiction.

Social Immobility

Fundamentalist capitalism sees itself as an active force against decadence through its ideology of competition, a rosy picture of 'survival of the fittest' and economic optimums rolled into one. Leaving aside the reality of oligopolies, and the statist nature of much technological development via defence spending, it is competition that is now used as a rationale for this exporting of middle class jobs. As Brian Valentine, a Microsoft VP, puts it, "competitors already have this outsourcing religion," therefore it's time for "Microsoft to join the party." His eyes focused on India with its thousands of low wage graduates. By the end of 2003 more than half of Fortune 500 had shipped a significant fraction of their intellectual labour jobs offshore. This reduces the demand for native US intellectual labour which will not ease the problem of personal indebtedness.

Fundamentalist capitalism has also seen itself as an active force against decadence because it allows, indeed makes for, social mobility. Recent statistics show this to be a deceit, as do changes in the education system of Britain and the US. In Britain New Labour's slogan of 'Education, Education, Education' and now of 'excellence' as the only way forward for Britain in the new globalised world, is undermined by the price of higher education and the re-creation of privilege in the state secondary school sector. In the US, as Dion Dennis has shown, students will be paying more at public universities and getting less in terms of high quality tuition. Most state legislatures are cutting their higher education budgets. This is in line with the fundamentalist belief that what is public is no good. This contradicts the claim to social mobility and may be, as Dennis puts it, "That elites are no longer willing to subsidise American public higher education, once they have gained global access via digital communication networks, to cheap and competent intellectual labour." This, as Greg Palast has pointed out, is in sharp contrast to the fully funded public education systems of the Indian states of Karnataka and Kerala. The very states who produce those "35 hour day engineers" of Thomas Friedman's fantasy.

'Yellow Peril'

And yet! Craig Barrett, chief executive of Intel talks of why the company has invested millions in trying to improve the way science is taught in US public schools, because there's not enough cutting edge talent coming out. And yet! Those armchair Spartans within the power elite must have some anxieties about the trends described. Unable to deal with the contradiction in any straightforward manner, except for the January 2004 decision to ban the outsourcing of government contracts, they focus their anxiety solely on China. That this country would be so focused was predicted nearly 100 years ago by J.A. Hobson in his *Imperialism* — even if, naturally enough, he missed the added attraction to present-day Western capital of the creation of an elite global consumer class of some 200 million people. On the one hand, Hobson wrote, "China seems to offer a unique opportunity to the European businessman. A population ... endowed with an extraordinary capacity of steady labour, with great intelligence,

inured to a low standard of physical comfort ... yielding the largest surplus product of labour in proportion to their cost of keep ...". On the other hand, "It is at least conceivable that China might so turn the tables upon the Western industrial nations, and, either, by adopting their capital and organisers or, as is more probable, by substituting their own, might flood their markets with her cheaper manufactures, and refusing their imports in exchange, might take her payment in liens upon their capital, reversing the earlier process of investment until she gradually obtained financial control over her quondam patrons and civilizers."

The factors for such an outcome are in place, but up until now they have taken a 'benign' form. That is, the benefit of phenomenal rates of savings in China and East Asia (savings as the disciplined forgoing of instant gratification) largely goes to the US, and supports its consumer binge by investing in the dollar even when interest rates are close to zero and, more importantly, supports the huge state investment in the military-industrial complex from which the US has derived so many successful technologies. Yet, it is still unnerving to the ideologists of decadence, the feeling that there is something profoundly wrong, weakening, about this relationship. It has now come out into the open with the Chinese oil company CNOOC's bid for the US oil company Unocal.

Mercenaries

So far, the dependence on Asian savings to finance the USA's Balance of Payment and Budget deficits, has been seen in a sanguine mood in the US itself, if not everywhere else. The advantages of the dollar as the major world reserve currency have been used to the full. Military wise guy Thomas Barnett in *The Pentagon's New Road Map* put it thus: "We trade little pieces of paper (our currency in the form of trade deficit) for Asia's amazing array of products and services. We are smart enough to know that this is a patently unfair deal unless we offer something of great value along with those pieces of paper. That product is a strong Pacific Fleet, which squares the transaction nicely." All this assumes a continued acceptable level of conflict, and it assumes continued US credibility when the occupation of Iraq has dented what was previously a near all-round global ability to punish and reward in the behaviourist style of the boot camp. The Spartan quality (King Leonidas' last stand) of rock throwers and especially suicide bombers, has also been a challenge. Thus Thomas Barnett while hailing the US's massive advantages in the weapons and the IT sophistication also says, "we fight fire with fire. If we live in world increasingly populated by Super-Empowered individuals, then we field an army of Super-Empowered individuals."

This too has its problems. The decline of the citizen army and recruitment of mercenary soldiers has traditionally been seen as a key indicator of decadence. The armies of the 'stern white men' are largely professional, and are yet still facing problems of recruitment. These are most acute in the US itself. They have turned on the one hand to a host of private military companies (at least 35 according to Deborah Avant) and the recruitment of non-US citizens to its army. One of Huntington's anxieties is multiculturalism in the US itself: "Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies," those who do not assimilate like "Hispanics in the USA." And yet as Jacob Heilbrunn has pointed out, Hispanics are amongst the most patriotic Americans, constituting a significant part of the US military which is now bolstered by 'green card soldiers', often from Central America and recruited on the promise of US citizenship, the processing of which was sped up on order from George W. Bush before the Iraq invasion began. This at a time when citizenship is much harder to come by since the immigration rules imposed by the post 9-11 Department of Homeland Security.

This development has worried other hard-line US nationalists like Mark Kirkorian, executive director of the Centre for Immigration Studies. In a piece in the *National Review* he argues that

"as the proportion of non-citizens in the armed forces grows there is the real possibility that defending America will become 'work Americans won't do' ... Not to put too fine a point on it, we should go to any lengths to avoid developing a kind of mercenary army, made up of foreigners loyal to their units and commanders but not to the Republic. It didn't work out well for the Romans." And he goes on to cite the dangerous precedent of the San Patricio Battalion, a group of Irish immigrants in the US army "who defected to fight for the enemy in the Mexican War."

Uncomfortable Truths

The occupation of Iraq has also revealed that remnants of a citizen army, the US reservists, have been needed in numbers because occupation is not a speciality of the professional army and Green card soldiers can not fill all the gaps. Since Vietnam the drawing board plan has been for them to be mobilised but then sent home quickly. This has not happened in the last two years. At the same time the *New York Times* reported in July 2004 that some military commanders comment in private that a number of reservists "arrive for duty ill-prepared for the challenges they face in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, and in particular they lack specific combat skills that are required even of truck drivers in a war zone. They say the reservists also lack something more intangible but equally important: a warrior ethos." This is an 'uncomfortable truth' for those like Huntington who trade in uncomfortable truths from their armchairs. Huntington's chief cheerleader, Robert Kaplan, is one upon whom this lack of a warrior ethos must grate especially. His own book, a rationalisation of unlimited brutality with a gothic overlay, is entitled *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership requires a Pagan Ethos*. In reality the evidence is that the citizen part of the army just isn't up to it. What they have done, the 'white trash' element who by-and-large joined up to get an education they otherwise would not, is to take the rap for the Abu Ghraib tortures. As one of those under investigation, Sabrina Harman said, "I knew nothing about the military except the fact they would pay for college." Meanwhile, General Taguba's report on the tortures talked of ineffective officers (also reservists), and painted a picture of armed soldiers wandering around the prison in civilian clothes; logbooks filled with "unprofessional entries and flippant comments"; old friendships replacing the military chain of command; and of how the saluting of officers was "sporadic."

Elite Fantasies

To avoid the contradictions between the resolute Spartan and the soft consumer, 'stern white men' elites go in for both victim blame and for defining decadence on their own terms, namely an unwillingness to work very long hours, often without overtime pay. This enables them to outsource decadence itself — to France. It also involves a nasty mix of fantasy, and the possibility of realising such fantasy, including an uneasy inclination to outsource Spartan qualities to Israel. This leaves out how, like Celine's icecubes, air conditioning is a basic necessity there; the high level of emigration from and financial corruption in that state; and the 'deteriorating standards' of its army remarked on by its reluctantly retired chief, Moshe Yaalon, with its "criminal subculture that had reached officer class." In reality the armchair Spartans like their comforts too. Look no further than US Vice President Cheney — the 'pagan warrior' with the contracts. All Kaplan is looking for with his 'Pagan ethos', is to be brutal without limits. Bagram, Guantanamo and Abu Gharib have done their bit, now torture too is being outsourced to hardline 'pagans'. The realisation of their fantasies will be based on investment in the technological fix, especially in powers of surveillance and punishment. For the obese (with obesity spreading out beyond the poor), there is already stomach stapling, and soon the hoodia plant taken from Kalahari bushmen for a pittance and turned into a product promising weight loss with no willpower involved. Investment in

robotics and AI, both civilian and military — how comforting to have no need of the decadent, but potentially dangerous servant class — is on its way to realising the dream of heterosexually characterised Grecian hoplite (heavy infantry) robots. This in addition to the development of bunker-buster bombs and small scale nuclear weapons. In January 2005, it was announced that the US planned to deploy 18 armed robots (Unmanned Ground Vehicles) in Iraq. According to Dan Glaister they have their drawbacks — they are slow and need refuelling every few hours — but their advantages are that: "They are cheap and require no food; they can be packed away between campaigns; they are unlikely — barring modifications — to write anguished letters to loved ones or the media ... They are also a much better shot than the average GI."

A recent *Wall Street Journal* report describes an internal Army memo sent to battalion commanders discouraging them from attempting to dismiss recruits for drug or alcohol abuse or poor fitness. This is because the drop-out rate and a failure to meet recruitment targets has become a matter of concern. One commander refers specifically to guys on 'weight-control' taking up a lot of his time. Another referred to recruiters under pressure to meet quotas — as if they were on the disappearing assembly lines of the country — and dropping standards. "There are guys showing up at units with physical problems or other issues who you would not have seen a couple of years ago." Other than the robots, the alternatives would seem to be unacceptable: prison amnesties or a return of the draft; both would make the contradictions of decadence rhetoric unavoidable. Meanwhile President Bush, some 16 months after his use of the "D" word, has had to make another speech on the occupation of Iraq, this time at the Fort Bragg army base. His cynical use of the 9/11 attack in the speech has been widely commented on. What really stands out however are the words 'sacrifice', the need for it; 'resolve', the need for it; 'our will', the certainty of it. Such things would not have to be said if the elite's monopoly power to define such characteristics were not so threatened by the realities of reality.

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