



Straight Talk

by Muriel Sluyter

Jefferson, Bush and the Pirates

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Greetings, Gentle Reader,

Monarchs have always paid tribute to retain power. During the early days of our country, the government, as well as Europe's kings, did the same with the Barbary pirates.

The pirates had terrorized the Mediterranean for well over a century, attacking ships and capturing sailors, then selling them into slavery. They were a constant threat to ships engaged in the lucrative spice trade.

Then Thomas Jefferson came along. Pirates captured one of our ships and Jefferson sent Stephen Decatur, captain of the *Enterprise*, to burn the captured ship and raid Tripoli harbor, after which they successfully cleaned out the pirates' nest. That is where the Marine hymn got the line, "to the shores of Tripoli."

Had America continued to pay tribute, pirates wouldn't have ceased preying on shipping, capturing and selling sailors, until someone else summoned the courage to accomplish the heroic task of annihilating them.

Things haven't changed. Persian Gulf monarchs and despots still pay tribute to modern day "pirates." Osama bin Laden was a prime example. He demanded and received tribute. Now, thanks to President Bush, the emaciated murderer whines that America must be destroyed, because he and his sons can no longer do anything but run and hide.

There are 29 modern-day terrorist/pirate groups based in Syria; they run drugs to keep themselves in power and money. The train in terrorist tactics in the Bekaa valley.

Syria continues to occupy Lebanon illegally and has attacked Israel repeatedly for decades, regularly lobbing mortar shells from the Golan Heights, until the Six Day War. Israel's offense was that it existed. The dictator, Assad, was determined to destroy it, as were other Arab governments.

Now, President Bush has demanded that governments cease to harbor, support and use terrorists, which is a new concept to gulf rulers. All have danced to the terrorists' tune — except Anwar Sadat, and he was promptly assassinated for defying them by signing a peace treaty with Israel.

The Middle East is a puzzle to most Westerners. David Pryce-Jones, having lived there for many decades, says Arab leaders tend to wallow in self-pity, belligerently proclaiming the West and Israel to be the cause of all of their problems. Whatever is amiss in their country is someone else's fault. This makes their followers dangerous to the objects of their carefully groomed and directed anger.

Another puzzle to Westerners: Many Gulf-area despots are as brutal and depraved as Saddam and his sons. Those in power live in opulent splendor (Many millions in American money have been found in Iraqi palaces thus far. So much for the oil-for-food program.), while their people barely subsist, and that in devastating poverty. Pirates/terrorists act as these rulers' enforcers more than oppressors.

The monarchs are afraid of the terrorists, but they are becoming even more afraid of President Bush, who is unwilling to permit Americans to remain under a continuing threat of attack. He has shown he is ready and able to use fearsome power to clean out terrorists' nests, and Middle Easterners respect power.

Gulf monarchs and dictators are being forced to make tough decisions. If they defy the terrorists, they will be attacked, perhaps assassinated. If they defy Bush and continue to accommodate and use terrorists for their own purposes, he may take them out. It's a hard choice.

Unfortunately for the West, unless or until Arab countries become healthy, constructive representative democracies (not theocracies), having been forcibly weaned from their pirate partners in crime, neither the blood-letting nor the terrorism will end.

That isn't good news for their potential victims, and that includes us.