



Alphonso Lingis

Ethics in the globalized war

With military technology increasingly reducing the risk of casualties on the side of those using the technology, traditional warrior virtues such as courage have become the preserve of the individual suicide attacker. Paradoxically, writes Alphonso Lingis, it was the photographs of Abu Ghraib that enabled Americans to reassert a sense of their own ethical correctness. In this respect, the photos stand in a line of images that have provided moral reassurance in the face of war.

Homer and Goya

Ethics and art collude to show us what we do with our lives and with our deaths, and what we do with the lives and deaths of others. Ethics enlists the rhetoric of verbal, visual, and mimetic art, deriving its concepts and arguments from art that publicly exhibits human behaviour and possibilities. From the earliest times, war has been a prime subject of art — depicted in epics such as the Mahabharata, the Iliad, the Bible, and in monuments such as Angkor Wat, Chichen Itza, and the Church of Santiago de Capostrano. This art depicted the ruler as sublime in himself, absorbing into his destiny the lives of nameless multitudes.

Ethics, from Aristotle to Heidegger, made courage and steadfastness in the face of death the primary virtue and condition for all others. Aristotle denied that those who met their death in shipwrecks, natural disasters, or fatal diseases could properly be called courageous; since they could not flee, they could only wait passively. For Aristotle, courage was the force that drove men to slaughter others at the risk of their own lives. Even today, we rarely call anyone a coward except someone who flees the battlefield — a vice lacking viciousness. Aristotle believed that the courage of the warrior — which combined prowess, skill, energy, choice, and action — should characterize citizens in the city–state, each of whom should be ready to enlist in the army if the occasion arose.

Even when the campaign was not victorious, high art worked to justify the slaughter of war by depicting death as being redeemed in heaven; like the Christian Son of God who laid down his life for the salvation of men, those who fell in battle were martyrs immediately received into the arms of God. After the French Revolution, the nation assumed the function of God; the blood of those who died in war pulsed through the nation and lived on in its immortality and glory.

Francisco de Goya's set of eighty etchings, "The Disasters of War", completed in 1808 but not published until 1863, is the first great work of contemporary art. These etchings, which depict the Napoleonic armies' invasion of Spain,

portray up-close men who are cornered, disarmed, castrated, and dismembered; the butchering of the infirm and aged unable to fight or flee; the mutilation and slaughter of children. The great causes of the war — the Napoleonic armies, heralding the Enlightenment, advancing into the darkness and superstition of rural Spain; the resistance of the indigenous people and their loyalties, traditions, and values — are invisible. Soldiers, peasants, women, children tear at one another like so many rabid dogs; mutilated corpses covered with flies are picked at by vultures under dark skies; scenes in which there is no God to witness, pity, and redeem so much agony, so many deaths.

Through the spectacle of mass slaughter, the classical art of wars and battlefields depicts a transcendent sphere of good. This is invoked either by the victorious Alexander, Charlemagne, or Joan of Arc, who absorb into themselves the agony and death of the brave, redeeming them with their glory, or else by a transcendent God, pitying, honouring, and redeeming those fallen in battle. With Goya, both the glorious Napoleon and the glorious King of Spain have disappeared. God has also disappeared. Their place is taken by the viewer, who, in horror and disgust, feels an immanent sphere of good rising from the depths his own moral instincts. Thus, Goya's "The Disasters of War", which depicts nothing but rabid and pointless slaughter, displaced classical art as the great humanist art of our time.

Although Goya's pictures of war have been recognized to be truthful to the point that they virtually put an end to the classical art that glorified and redeemed agony and death in war, they had no effect on the forces that drove Europeans to war. Does this lead us to think that humanist art has no power to affect the course of human conduct? Or to think that the humanist sentiments it provokes — the conviction of a core moral integrity in us — actually functions to serve the war industry in our times?

Europe was soon to launch itself into war again, taking most of the world with it: wars to make the world safe for democracy, wars to end all wars. Louis-Ferdinand Céline depicted the First World War in his novel *Journey to the End of the Night*. He saw not only no sign whatsoever of a pitying and redemptive God, but also the utter hypocrisy of the values and slogans of the Enlightenment, and even the vacuity of the nation as a cause worth dying for. For Céline, nations were themselves nothing but slaughterhouses whose governments' function was to soak the land with the blood of butchered and mutilated populations. The war literature by those who fought the Second World War and the Korean War divest war of any shimmer of the glory that heads of state, military chaplains, or propaganda filmmakers project onto it; soldiers' memoirs document step-by-step the descent of ordinary and decent young men into orgies of degradation.

Immediately after liberation at the end of the Second World War, France, together with the United States, waged thirty years of war on Indochina, slaughtering some three million people and covering the land, forests, and rivers with toxic substances that resulted in uncounted genetic birth defects in subsequent generations, without realizing the democracy that was supposed to redeem the dead. The memoirs of American soldiers sent to Vietnam showed they had not been made virtuous by courage; their annealing by war did not make them fit for civilian life. Indeed, the draft was terminated; risking life in battle was no longer the civic duty of every young man.

In 2000, British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman purchased for 50 000 pounds a set of etchings by Goya and painted grinning clown and puppy-dog faces

over those Goya had depicted stricken with horror and agony. By desecrating Goya's work, the art called "humanist" in our barbarous age, the Chapmans were denouncing the public's conviction in its own moral instincts as the principle obstacle to lucid and ruthless analysis of the state and the military juggernaut. Henceforth, ethics would have to undertake a lucid and cold-blooded analysis of the aims of nation-states and the internal dialectics of military technology.

War without battles

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the directorate of the Pentagon and their political and corporate partners saw a unique historical opportunity in the enormous arsenal the United States had assembled. It is not only the size of the American arsenal but its nature that is decisive: even the armies and air forces of its Nato allies cannot coordinate their equipment with the high-tech, "smart" weaponry and delivery systems of the US. The US has 725 military bases in 132 countries around the world. In fact, much of the arsenals of other countries are under American control: American arms manufacturers hold contracts for about half of all weapons sold worldwide. The 9/11 attacks provided the US military with the opportunity to double its spending budget to 419 billion dollars, equalling that of all the other nations combined, a position unprecedented in human history — in order to impose a pax Americana across the oil fields of the Middle East, South Asia, Nigeria, and Venezuela.

The 58 175 American soldiers killed in Vietnam and the several hundred thousand maimed for life had proven unacceptable to the public. Before President Clinton proposed military intervention in Haiti, Senator Bob Dole expressed the public sentiment in proclaiming that Haiti was not worth one American life. Henceforth, military operations would have to be launched without the loss of a single American soldier. In the Pentagon, this was now seen to be possible. During the first Gulf War, only 147 allied soldiers were killed, half of them by "friendly fire"; during the invasion of Haiti, not one US soldier was killed; during the war on Serbia, not one Nato soldier was killed; during the invasion of Afghanistan, only one CIA agent was killed.

High above the 3400-meter-high mountains of eastern Afghanistan, the surveillance cameras in an unmanned plane, a Predator drone, record a truck on a mountain road surrounded by men. The Predator drone hovers several miles away; several hundred miles away, at an American base, a technician viewing the live feed from the cameras thinks they may be wearing Arab, not Afghan garb, and that one looks taller than the others. Osama bin Laden is known to be tall. The agent transmits his report to the US Central Command at its headquarters on the other side of the planet, in Florida. Soldiers seated there program the Predator to annihilate the men around the truck. The Predator launches a 45 kg Hellfire missile that screams toward them at 1600 k.p.h. Six days later, when Predator surveillance establishes that there is nobody anywhere near the site and there is no risk in landing soldiers there, American special forces troops are dropped by helicopter. Their mission is only to determine if the dead were Arabs, hence al-Qaeda fighters.

Both the Israeli-made Predator and the Global Hawk cameras can produce high-resolution images in all weather and at night. Insect-size devices that will do low-level reconnaissance in swarms are now being developed. Robotic weapons now include the Cypher, a flying surveillance vehicle providing lookout for advancing troops; the Marvin, a ground surveillance vehicle that can be dropped by a plane; Fetch It, a minesweeper; the Robart III, a ground

patrol robot; the Sand Dragon, an unmanned all-terrain vehicle with attack capabilities; and the Fire Ant, a mobile anti-tank weapon. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is developing small lightweight robots that will scour sewers and tunnels for explosives and biological and chemical weapons. Andros is a tracked vehicle only 17 inches wide with arms dexterous enough to unlock a door. In today's world of high-tech and robotized military assaults, courage has become obsolete. Though all the arts of public rhetoric applaud the courage of the young men and women drafted or enlisted into the military, in fact it is their mechanical, engineering, and computing skills, along with their willingness to follow orders, that are required of them.

217 billion dollars have been assigned to Future Combat Systems to build robot soldiers — the biggest military contract in US history. These robots will look, think, and fight like soldiers. They will haul munitions, gather intelligence, search buildings or blow them up. Several hundred are already digging up roadside bombs in Iraq, scouring caves in Afghanistan, and serving as armed sentries at weapons depots. Robot soldiers capable of firing 1000 rounds a minute will soon be in Baghdad. "They don't get hungry," said Gordon Johnson of the Joint Forces Command at the Pentagon, "They're not afraid. They don't forget their orders. They don't care if the guy next to them has just been shot." The Pentagon today owes its soldiers 653 billion dollars in future retirement benefits that it cannot presently pay. The average lifetime cost of a soldier is about 4 million dollars. Robot soldiers will cost less than a tenth of that.

In reality, the requirement that not one soldier die in a military offensive is not a new shackle clamped on military strategists; modern wars are launched against civilian populations, not armies. In the First World War, 90 per cent of the killed and wounded were soldiers. In the Second World War, only 40 per cent of the killed and wounded were soldiers. In the wars of the last decade, 90 per cent of the killed and wounded have been civilians. The battlefield is no longer the theatre of war. The Nazi blitz on London, the fire-bombing of Dresden, the thermonuclear bombs that incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the bombing of Serbia during the Kosovo war, aimed not to destroy an enemy army but to terrorize the civilian population. For five decades, the Pentagon and the Kremlin pursued the strategy of Mutual Assured Destruction, eventually building up thermonuclear arsenals capable of incinerating a Hiroshima-sized city every day for the next five hundred and fifty years. The Shock and Awe assault on Iraq was designed to terrorize the whole population, not engage the Iraqi army. The obliteration of the city of Falluja was a Shock and Awe assault designed not to confront the insurgents but demoralize its supporters, the Iraqi population seething with resentment about the US occupation.

Science fiction writers and filmmakers, awed by the dizzying advance of technology and genetic engineering, have been depicting a coming century in which systems controlled by artificial intelligence have taken over and in which humans have been reduced to animal products raised and harvested for the use of the machines.

The power of individuals: Action movies

Military historians have shown that every advance in weapons technology provokes the production of a weapon to counter it in less time than it took to make the original advance: horses then crossbows, tanks then mortars, aircraft then anti-aircraft guns, ever more destructive thermonuclear bombs then ever

more accurate antimissile missiles. But there is another dialectic in the history of contemporary technology that is the more striking in that it defies our paradigms of understanding. The bigger the enterprises of today — vast teams of highly educated inventors, experts, engineers, protected by ingenious systems of electronic surveillance — the more vulnerable they have turned out to be to ever smaller numbers of low-tech saboteurs, even to lone individuals. In the 1970s, jumbo jets were seized by skyjackers. Then pharmaceutical giants were destroyed by individuals injecting rat poison into bottles on the shelves of provincial supermarkets. The Internet was first set up by the Pentagon to coordinate military information and then vastly expanded for commercial use. Youthful hackers found the most secure systems vulnerable to viruses and two high school dropouts in Karachi shut down the supercomputers of the Pentagon.

The hacker finds his individual mind is superior to that of the experts in whole industries. The skyjacker or industrial saboteur realizes exceptional resolve, patience, and boldness. The possession not only of exceptional power but also exceptional intelligence and exceptional character traits, this realization of intense individual identity, has always been the inner reward of industrial and military spies.

Small commandos, even individuals, who undergo rigorous physical and intellectual training and penetrate enemy strongholds to carry out sabotage, are an essential element of contemporary military and economic conflict. The Special Forces commando or FBI agent who penetrates an enemy army or criminal organization aims only to destroy and will kill with as little hesitation or regard for ethical or political rules as the enemy or criminal agents he is combating.

As long as these missions are in progress, they are the most secret of national secrets. But later, they are the dominant topic of celebratory history. Hollywood movies depict the lone police agent penetrating and destroying the organized crime machine, the international drug cartel, the base of technologically advanced aliens. These films glorify the victory of individuals against organizations heavily armed with technologically advanced weaponry.

Real time

Everything depended on something ineffable and utterly individual: will. They lived in the country for a year and spoke good English. They socialized with other student pilots and with their neighbours in the suburbs, shopped in the supermarkets, socialized in local bars, relaxed at home with videos of Hollywood movies.

Their weapons were their bodies — they had had martial arts training — and their will. On the planes, just three of them — on one plane two of them — were in charge of subduing the flight attendants and passengers with small box cutters. Two overpowered the pilots as soon as the planes had reached maximum altitude and speed. They directed one plane to the command centre of the greatest war machine the planet has ever seen. As the minutes passed, the capital city and then the target came into view; the men at the controls knew they would succeed. Two of the other planes were turned toward Manhattan, which the new pilots had not seen before from this airspace. The life in the man now piloting the airliner, his will driven by his surging emotions, was on the brink of annihilation, yet he was able to command his attention and his newly learned skills flawlessly. As the World Trade Centre

tower zooms into the centre of his vision, his heart blazes a moment before the impact, his exultation screams in the roar of the plane he directs. At the moment of impact and explosion, he is still able to turn the plane so that it severs girders in the tower. The individual and his will are annihilated in the exploding jet fuel; then the upper floors falling into the flames turns the entire tower itself into a colossal self-destroying automatism.

The second plane had been timed to hit the second tower some minutes later so that video cameras would record it. For the rest of the day, the world media showed over and over again the strike and the collapse of the towers.

The destruction of a wing of the Pentagon and of both World Trade Centre towers by this small commando of individuals is to all prior acts of infiltration and sabotage what the atomic bomb detonated on Hiroshima was to all prior bombings. It was an act on a world scale, an attack on the command centres of the world's only superpower. These fortresses of technology proved vulnerable to individuals using the most low-tech means and the most primitive weapons, driven by their individual wills, determined to sacrifice themselves.

Suicide missions are a constant of war. The Iwo Jima monument commemorates the 40 000 men sent to die on that uninhabited island. In the Vilnius ghetto sealed by the Nazi forces, a Jewish commando called "The Avengers" vowed to die not in the imminent pogrom but on sabotage missions. From the Palestinian people, who for forty years have been sealed in an economic blockade and subjected to Israeli tank incursions and helicopter strikes, there has come an uninterrupted succession of men and women volunteering for suicide missions. On 9/11, four passengers on one of the hijacked planes, learning about the crash into the World Trade Centre, decided to attack the hijackers; they succeeded in crashing the plane in a field in Pennsylvania, sacrificing themselves and everyone on the plane.

In a world where high-tech military dominance becomes global, sacrificial individualism may appear anywhere — in Northern Ireland, Chechnya, Basque Spain, Columbia, Myanmar, Mindanao in the Philippines, Indonesian Papua and Aceh, Nagaland in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Kashmir, Kurdish Turkey, Israel, Algeria, Lebanon, Sudan, Chad, Darfur, Uganda, Burundi, Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Ethiopia.

Producing a picture of the good

The public was well informed about the succession of conflicts that led to the outbreak of the First World War and about the economic crisis and German rearmament that resulted in the Second World War. But with the end of the Cold War, the television media cut back most of their foreign correspondents; the public was relatively uninformed about the deep conflicts arising from the global struggle for markets and energy sources. 9/11 was sudden and unexpected; the media portrayed it as the mass death of ordinary Americans who simply wanted to live and make a living, and who had no idea that they were participants in any kind of struggle. The intense visceral feelings of horror and fear, periodically intensified by repeated Red Alerts, functioned as evidence in individuals across the US of their will to live, which appeared sacred to them, a core goodness — such that the force that struck such horror and fear in them could only be Evil itself. The question whether this sacred will to live could be a cause worth dying for did not arise: the high-tech arsenal that the superpower already had and quickly increased would shock, awe, and exterminate populations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea.

Indeed, this war would require not even economic sacrifice; while the military budget soared, taxes were cut across the board.

The man or woman on a suicide mission judges that he or she can do little or nothing for his or her people by living, but can do something for them by dying, if only to counter the shame of their impotent existence. How can one threaten the self-sacrificial individual? One cannot terrorize a commando determined to die. What one can set out to do is hunt them down and exterminate them before they die by their own sword, with their own act. One can set out to demonstrate that they do nothing, even if they succeed in their suicide mission. One does so by demonstrating that their existence, and the shame of the impotent and abject existence of their people, is and shall be worthless. One sets out to demonstrate that their deaths, like their lives, are worthless.

Hunting down and exterminating the real and potential suicide commandos yielded great public spectacles of destruction: the carpet bombing of Afghanistan; the locking up of those who surrendered in containers without air ducts, hauled out into the desert sun until they were all dead; the slaughter of uncounted Iraqis during and after the invasion, the levelling of Falluja, a city of 300 000 people, after four American mercenaries were killed there. Classical art depicted the individual corpses and faces of the dead in great numbers: the Mahabharata, the Iliad, the Bible measured the glory of the victor by recording the numbers, the tens of thousands slaughtered on the battlefields. How many were killed in Afghanistan, in Iraq? The dead are not depicted; they are not even numbered. These operations function to demonstrate that these populations can do nothing with their lives or their deaths.

The atrocities of the good

In Afghanistan and Iraq, tens of thousands of people were rounded up from the scene of acts of sabotage by soldiers who spoke no Pushtu, Uzbek, Farsi, or Arabic, and incarcerated without charge; according to reports of Red Cross investigators and later by the army itself, up to 90 per cent were innocent. Thousands of others were incarcerated in a vast secret Gulag from Guantanamo to Pakistan. Officially, these captives are being held for interrogation. Official Washington policy statements enjoined methods identified as torture by the Geneva Conventions as a means to extract information about the al-Qaeda organization and the Iraqi resistance. An unknown number of captives have been transferred to prisons in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, where torture is assured.

Captives were tortured from the moment the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad was reopened. Within a month, the CIA, the FBI, and the Red Cross had detailed the torture practiced there and submitted their reports to the highest US authorities. Six months later, photographs of torture, which had at first been suppressed, were published by the media. The army immediately banned the use of digital cameras by soldiers and soldiers destroyed most of the photographs they had taken. The United States Senate viewed behind closed doors 1800 more photographs and videos of torture in Abu Ghraib, and suppressed public access to them.

Ethics, from Aristotle to Heidegger, made courage and steadfastness the first virtue and the condition for the possibility of all the other virtues. Those who flee from battle, from seeking to kill others at the risk of their own lives, are cowards. Cowardice far from the battlefield is pure and abject: when an armed

man or woman lashes out at a person who is unarmed and defeated, forcing him to perform acts utterly degrading in his own eyes and take from him what he thought was his courage, even the courage to die, because he will not be allowed to die. The picture of the Iraq war is a picture of this extreme cowardice: the torture of unarmed and captive people, a young woman dragging a naked captive on the floor by a leash around his neck, young men stripping naked an old woman and sodomizing her with a stick. Cowardice doubling over itself in derisive laughter, photographing itself, contemplating itself.

Torture practiced by sadist individuals called has been studied since the writings of the Marquis de Sade, Kraft-Ebbing, and Freud, who introduced the term "sadist" to define a psychological complex. Torture as an institutional practice requires a quite separate analysis. So soon after the liberation of France from Nazism, torture was widely practiced by the French army during the struggles for national liberation in Indochina and Algeria. Henri Alleg and Jean-Paul Sartre devoted themselves to understanding how torture had become a policy of the French state. After an extended stay in South America during the military regimes in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, Michel de Certeau deepened these analyses.

In the United States, former high military and intelligence officials have declared that the long history of torture in military and civil conflicts proves that torture is an unreliable method of extracting information from captives. In captives who are committed and strong, torture arouses hatred and contempt for the torturers and hardens resolve. Those who torture can break down physically and psychologically will admit to anything and invent whatever information is demanded in order to stop the torture. It is clear that the torture practiced in Abu Ghraib, where up to 90 per cent of captives knew nothing, was not practiced because of the yield in information; the commander of the intelligence agents there has reported that little of interest was ever obtained. Although officially the hundreds of prisoners in Guantanamo have not been charged, it is clear that they have nothing useful to tell about the locations and operations of al-Qaeda. The State Department is now looking for foreign countries that will accept them and can be reliably committed to keeping them incarcerated without charge or trial for the rest of their lives.

In fact, torture is inflicted in order to force the captive to confess that whatever he has to say is worthless. To force him to confess that his analysis of the socio-economic and political situation and the beliefs of his comrades are lies and delusions. The captive is kept in locations deprived of any contact with the outside, and told he will never again see his comrades or his homeland or the outside world again. Torture works to break down his mind with sleep deprivation and blaring music, such that the captive finds he can no longer think or remember. Beatings, electric shocks, deprivation of painkillers, food, and water, make him realize he can no longer remain lucid, his very sense organs are shown to be untrustworthy. He is being forced to confess that he is incapable of truth. Stripping him naked, chaining him to the ground so that he lies in his own urine and shit, forces him to see that he is a useless body, refuse, excrement. The photographs taken by British soldiers in Basra show their captives naked and entangled in nets, beaten, lying in their own blood and urine and shit — for having stolen bread from the compound.

What dominates in the photographs taken at Abu Ghraib and the recent FBI report of practices at Guantanamo is the bizarre sexual degradation of the captives. This was aimed at what is taken to be the ideological framework of

their minds and conduct: their Islamic faith. Female interrogators dressed in thongs and halters who rub their genitals and menstrual blood onto the faces of the captives intended to pollute the Muslim captive and make him unable to pray and invoke his God. The photographs feature men forced into homosexual acts and piled up naked before the gleeful smirks of young American women. These are not the kind of cruelties sadistic individuals think up; the macho bullies in high school locker rooms who humiliate others by calling them queer do not find young women to watch forced homosexual acts. These were scenarios of degradation enjoined by military intelligence officials who had read about Islamic culture and mores; they were staged as specifically Muslim degradations. Their sourcebook was soon identified by anthropologists: a book on Islamic beliefs and mores, published by an anthropologist in 1930 and much studied in the Pentagon.

From time to time a member of the enemy is shown to the press and cameras confessing that all he had believed in was lies and delusion. From time to time a captive is released to show his comrades his subhuman condition. The captives in Abu Ghraib were told that the photographs of their sexual degradation would be shown in their Muslim communities, so that henceforth they would be pariahs.

Like thirty years earlier, when the photograph of a child running, screaming, her flesh burning with napalm, became the image and truth of the American war on Vietnam, and like a century and a half earlier, when Goya's "The Disasters of War" became the image and truth of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, it was immediately recognized that these photographs had become irretrievably, irrevocably, the image and truth of the American occupation of Iraq.

The Muslim world, from Morocco to Mindinao, 20 per cent of humanity, saw not the torture of the defeated population randomly rounded up by the foreign invader, but torture of Muslims as Muslims. United States policymakers knew that would not make a significant difference: international polls had shown that the Muslim world was overwhelmingly convinced that the United States was engaged in a global strategy to control the petroleum resources of the Middle East. The Spanish, the Hondurans, the Filipinos, the Turks, the Ukrainians, the Hungarians, not to mention countries that had not sent token troops to Iraq, saw proof that the Americans would be unable to impose a pro-American democratic regime on Iraq. But only the most naive imagined the United States' objective was to maintain a strong and stable independent Iraq, which the State Department knew from the start would sooner or later be the most anti-American and anti-Israeli state in the Middle East.

Totalitarian states, which include in the subjugation of their citizens the suppression of information, suppress knowledge of state torture. When, after the defeat of Germany in 1945, the German public learned of the existence of the Nazi camps, the new German government institutionalized scrupulous respect for human rights. What will be the effect of the photographs of torture on the American public?

The media itself suppressed the Abu Ghraib torture photographs for two weeks after they received them; now they were broadcasted again and again, the media and the public could not get enough of them. This insistent projection of the photographs to the American public was contrived to provoke intense feelings of disgust and repugnance. President Bush gave the watchword: Americans view these images with disgust and repugnance. The intensity of

disgust and repugnance across the land functioned as evidence, in each viewer, of his or her own core decency, his or her instinctual moral integrity. Americans looked about themselves, and could not imagine anybody they knew, any of the young men and women in the streets and in the mall, indulging in such depraved and disgusting acts. The sense of their own core moral integrity convinced them that, apart from these few perverts, the 150 000 National Guardsmen and enlisted servicemen and women there are brave, generous, idealistic liberators — or as Senator Lieberman insisted, "kind".

In his first public statement after the release of the photographs, Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that the world would now see American Justice. The army itself was charged with the investigation and with punishing those concerned for violation of its own code of conduct. The public was reassured of the irreproachable integrity of the army, whose procedures would be now installed in the interim Iraq government for the public trial of Saddam Hussein. The photographs functioned to convince the American public of their intrinsic righteousness, and the intrinsic righteousness of a collective action taken in their name by citizens like themselves.

Immediately after 9/11, the American president identified the attackers as being irrationally motivated by pure evil, and the American population, by contrast, as good. But launching long-range high-altitude bombers from Florida to reduce Afghanistan to rubble was too obviously a massive outburst of revenge to convince Americans of their intrinsic goodness. It was the photographs, the disgust and revulsion they aroused, that made their intrinsic goodness evident to them. They returned President Bush to office by a majority, seeing in him someone like themselves.

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