

# Corrupt Language

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There is a great deal of outcry about secret big money corrupting elections, and we need more outcry until some semblance of democracy can be restored.

But we don't hear about corrupt language, which works even better than big money to produce corrupt policy. In fact, most of that big money is spent on corrupt language; and a great deal of it is produced for free.

Take the public discussion of American foreign policy, which routinely smooths over falsehoods by using deft and deceptive platitudes.

Here's a prime example, a simple little phrase that is now a commonplace, that the war in Iraq was "a war of choice."

If you actually think about it, you see right away that the expression means nothing. Going to war is never involuntary behavior: it is always something people choose to do.

But it's a cunning expression. The word "choice" evokes the subsurface awareness that the decision to go to war might have gone the other way, that there were reasons for not going to war.

But the expression deflects awareness from those reasons by focusing on the "choice"; and in this evasion lies the falsehood.

The reason for not going to war was simple enough: the regime of Saddam Hussein posed no threat to the United States. It did not possess weapons of mass destruction, had no capacity to produce them, and had no collaborative relationship with Al Qaeda. Hussein was an obnoxious ruler, but a harmless and defenseless one.

To accept the phrase "war of choice" is to dismiss these facts.

Our unprovoked aggression in Iraq resulted in more than 100,000 Iraqi deaths, sent more than 2 million Iraqi people fleeing for their lives, and wrecked the government and infrastructure of the nation.

Calling it a "war of choice" declares this holocaust trivial.

This is different from saying that the prize was worth the cost, that the horrors inflicted upon the Iraqi people (and the cost to the American people) must be measured against the benefits that were realized.

Benefits? Sane and credible pundits do not want to stir up the question of benefits.

Did the American people benefit? Did the people of Iraq benefit? Such questions are ludicrous on their face, and what's worse they raise questions that are not ludicrous.

Make a list of potential beneficiaries.

1. The US arms industry, which opened up new markets for their products.
2. Western oil companies, hoping to gain unobstructed access to Iraqi oil, once a stable government in Baghdad is supported by a US garrison force.
3. American imperialists who want --- by means of this garrison --- to enlarge the system of 700+ US military installations on foreign soil around the world.

These are deeply troubling concerns, but there is no need to engage them, if they can be swept off the table by a rhetoric of falsehood that passes for public truth.

Consider alternative characterizations of the war:

1. unprovoked aggression
2. armed robbery
3. imperial expansion

What sane and credible pundit wants to tangle with these issues?

No judicial body, here or abroad, has heard evidence on charges that the American invasion of Iraq was a crime. And no such adjudication is conceivable in the future.

In the court of American public opinion, likewise, discussion of the ethical and political realities of the war is silenced, apparently for good. It lies outside the limits of sane and credible commentary, as laid out by the corrupt language: it was a “war of choice.”

Public debate over the war in Afghanistan goes forward in this warped and shrunken forum, where evasive euphemism rules. American citizens are prisoners of that war, because American minds have been taken captive.