

Naomi Klein

By NAOMI KLEIN
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In December, 1990, U.S. President George Bush Sr. travelled through South America to sell the continent on a bold new dream: "a free-trade system that links all of the Americas." Addressing the Argentine congress, he said that the plan, later to be named the Free-Trade Area of the Americas would be "our hemisphere's new declaration of interdependence the brilliant new dawn of a splendid new world."

Last week, Mr. Bush's two sons joined forces to try to usher in that new world by holding the FTAA negotiations in friendly Florida. This is the state that Governor Jeb Bush vowed to "deliver" to his brother during the 2000 presidential elections, even if that meant keeping many African-Americans from exercising their right to vote. Now Jeb Bush was vowing to hand his brother the coveted trade deal, even if that meant keeping thousands from exercising their right to protest.

And yet, despite the Bush brothers' best efforts, the dream of a hemisphere united into a single free-market economy died last week. It was killed not by demonstrators in Miami, but by the populations of Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia, which have let their politicians know that if they sign away any more power to foreign multinationals, they may as well not come home.

The Brazilians brokered a compromise that makes the agreement a pick-and-choose affair, allowing governments to sign on to the parts they like and refuse the ones they don't. Washington will, of course, continue to try to bully individual countries and groups of nations into sweeping trade contracts on the model of the North American free-trade agreement, but there will be no single, unified deal.

Inside the Hotel Inter-Continental, it was being called "FTAA Lite."

Outside, we experienced something distinctly heavier: "War Lite." In fact, the more control the U.S. trade representatives lost at the negotiating table, the more raw power the police exerted on the streets. "Our goal was to drown you out," one Miami-Dade police officer explained to me, and that's exactly what they did. Small, peaceful demonstrations were attacked with extreme force; organizations were infiltrated by undercover officers who then used stun guns on activists; busses filled with union members were prevented from joining permitted marches; dozens of young faces were smashed into concrete and beaten bloody with batons; human rights activists had guns pointed at their heads at military-style checkpoints.

Police violence outside of trade summits is not new, but what was striking about Miami was how divorced the security response was from anything resembling an actual threat. From an activist perspective, the protests were disappointingly small and almost embarrassingly obedient, an understandable response to weeks of police intimidation.

Listening to the incessant roar of helicopters and the march of police boots, I couldn't shake the feeling that something new was going on. It felt less like we were the targets of this operation than the target practice, unwitting extras in an elaborate military drill.

The FTAA Summit in Miami represents the official homecoming of the "war on terror." The latest tactical and propaganda techniques honed in Iraq — from a Hollywoodized military to a militarized media — have now been used on a grand scale in a major U.S. city. "This should be a model for homeland defence," Miami Mayor Manny Diaz proudly said of the security operation that brought together over 40 law-enforcement agencies, from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

But in order for the Miami Model to work, the police first had to establish a connection between legitimate activists and dangerous terrorists. Enter Miami Police Chief John Timoney, an avowed enemy of activist "punks" who repeatedly classified FTAA opponents as "outsiders coming in to terrorize and vandalize our city."

With the activists recast as dangerous aliens, Miami became eligible for the open tap of public money irrigating the "war on terror." In fact, \$8.5-million spent on security during the FTAA meeting came directly out of the \$87-billion President Bush extracted from Congress for Iraq last month — a fact barely reported outside of the Miami press. But more was borrowed from the Iraq invasion than just money. Miami police also invited reporters to "embed" with them in armoured vehicles and helicopters. As in Iraq, most reporters embraced their role as pseudo-soldiers with unsettling zeal, suiting up in ridiculous combat helmets and brand-new camouflage flak jackets.

The resulting media coverage was the familiar wartime combination of dramatic images and non-information. We know, thanks to an "embed" from the Miami Herald, that Police Chief Timoney was working so hard hunting down troublemakers that by 3:30 on Thursday, "he had eaten only a banana and an oatmeal cookie since 6 a.m." Local television stations didn't cover the protests so much as hover over them. Their helicopters showed images of confrontations but instead of hearing the voices on the streets — voices of demonstrators pleading with police to stop shooting and clearly following orders to disperse — we heard only from senior police officials and perky news anchors commiserating with the boys on the front line.

Meanwhile, independent journalists who dared to do their jobs and film the police violence up close were actively targeted. "She's not with us," one officer told another as they grabbed Ana Nogueira, a correspondent with Pacifica Radio's Democracy Now! who was covering a peaceful protest outside the Miami-Dade county jail. When the police established that Ms. Nogueira was indeed "not with us" (i.e. neither an embedded reporter nor an undercover cop) she was hauled away and charged.

The Miami Model of dealing with dissent reaches far beyond a single meeting. On Sunday, the New York Times reported on a leaked FBI bulletin revealing "a co-ordinated, nationwide effort to collect intelligence" on the U.S. anti-war movement. The memorandum singles out perfectly lawful protest activities including non-violence training, videotaping of police actions and Internet organizing. Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, said that the document revealed that, "The FBI is dangerously targeting Americans who are engaged in nothing more than lawful protest and dissent. The line between terrorism and legitimate civil disobedience is blurred."

We can expect much more of these tactics on the homeland front. Just as civil liberties violations escalated when Washington lost control over the FTAA process, so will repression increase as the Bush crew faces the ultimate threat: losing control over the White House.

Already, Jim Wilkinson, director of strategic communications at U.S. Central Command in Doha, Qatar, (the operation that gave the world the Jessica Lynch rescue), has moved to New York to head up media operations for the Republican National Convention. "We're looking at embedding reporters," he told the New York Observer of his plans to use some of the Iraq tricks during the convention. "We're looking at new and interesting camera angles."

The war is coming home.

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