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Monsters, Inc. **by Sam Bostaph**

In 2001, an animated film from Pixar Animation Studios was released and became extremely popular with both adults and children. *Monsters, Inc.* is set in the city of Monstropolis, where all monsters live. A corporation that gives the title to the movie employs “scarers,” monsters who venture out of the city every night to enter the human world through the closets of children. Their job is to scare children into screaming because the screams can be collected and used to generate the electricity that powers Monstropolis. The children themselves, and all their things, are believed to be toxic to monsters and must be kept out of the city.

One night a furry, blue monster named Sulley is followed by a child through her closet door into Monstropolis and panic ensues. In the midst of it, Sulley discovers that she isn’t toxic at all. His frantic attempts to conceal the girl he nicknames “Boo” and to return her to the human world only make her laugh. When she laughs, power surges brighten the city lights.

Sulley’s boss, Mr. Waternoose, knows that children are not toxic and schemes to increase the energy available to the city. He will have children kidnapped and brought back to Monstropolis, where scream machines will suck out all their screams.

Monsters, Inc. is a useful analogue for understanding the main purpose that President George W. Bush’s “war on terror” serves. Since September 11, 2001, Osama bin Laden, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq have served as useful monsters in generating screams from the American public. The resulting enhancements in federal government power have enabled the Bush administration to use the military forces of the United States to invade and occupy both Afghanistan and Iraq and to install puppet governments in both countries. It is inconceivable that police in any city in the United States or members of any federal civilian or military agency would be routinely permitted to kill anyone harboring or even being in the vicinity of a domestic fugitive. The enhancement of federal power that the “war on terror” has provided has enabled the adoption of Rules of Engagement by U.S. military forces that permit exactly that treatment of civilian targets in Iraq. The result has been the killing without distinction of an estimated 100,000 Iraqi men, women, and children.

The enhancement of federal power provided by the “war on terror” has also led to the incarceration of military captives for indefinite periods, the violation of Geneva Convention strictures on the treatment of prisoners of war, the deliberate torture of prisoners, the kidnapping of foreign nationals, and the “rendition” of kidnap victims to other countries where they can be tortured out of the view of the U.S. media. Even the recent revelation of the unlawful spying on U.S. citizens by the National Security Agency has resulted in more public expressions of support than condemnation.

George W. Bush is our Mr. Waterhouse (although the cartoon character looks more like Dick Cheney). Unfortunately, he and the “scarer” monsters in his administration have succeeded in strapping the American public to a scream machine and are extracting more screams to provide more power to the executive branch. Their latest ploy is the demonizing of Iran, the creation of yet another monster for further power enhancement.

American foreign policy would better serve the domestic needs of peace and security if it were used to cultivate friends rather than enemies and create trading partners rather than areas to pillage. One of the first positive steps in this direction would be to withdraw all military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan and to close every U.S. base in every foreign country. U.S. troops should be on U.S. soil unless they are fighting a declared war that someone else started.

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