

# Egypt blind spot in American rear view mirror

By Bill Fletcher Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

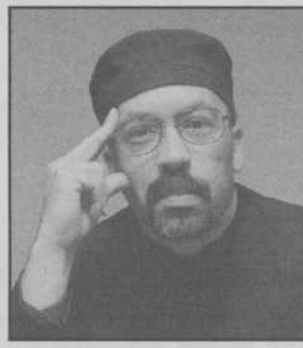
The Egyptian regime of President Hosni Mubarak presents a problem for Bush administration foreign policy. Mubarak, a long time ally, if not vassal, for the United States, refuses to permit actual political democracy in his country. Given the administration's vitriolic rhetoric against various world leaders who actually or supposedly frustrate democracy, whether Iraq's former dictator Saddam Hussein or Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, one must ask, why does the administration seem to look away when it comes to Egypt?

Though Mubarak periodically squawks about particular actions of the United States, he has generally been highly supportive and, in some cases, influential in advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives. While there have been periodic tensions with Israel since the commencement of the decades-old Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Egypt has done precious little to strengthen Arab support for the Pal-

estinian national movement. While Mubarak uttered words of opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, he displayed a lack of leadership in the Arab World in response to the outright aggression. Thus, while his words may periodically speak of Arab unity and in defense of various causes, there is actually little to show for it.

At home, Mubarak, one of the longest sitting rulers in Africa, has taken few significant steps at democratization. While the Bush administration has "encouraged" the expansion of democracy in Egypt, their words have been particularly mild; particularly, that is, when considering that a very broad spectrum of Egyptian opinion is calling for free and fair elections and a climate of tolerance of differences of opinion.

Mubarak has been very shrewd in dealing with opposition. When opposition emerges on the political Left, Mubarak finds a way of



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uniting with Islamic right-wingers, forces that are often supportive or at least tolerant of extremism, in order to crush the political left. When the Islamic right-wingers become too strong, he then finds a way of cracking down on them.

Yet, there is nothing in this behavior that the Bush administration seems to find particularly objectionable. As long as Mubarak toes the Bush administration line it appears that he can have a very long leash, a leash originating in Washington, D.C., of course. Contrast this with the situation in Zimbabwe.

As any reader of my columns knows, that public policy organization that I direct, TransAfrica Forum, has been very critical of President Mugabe for his undermining political democracy and for his economic policies that have, more often than not, served the interests of international financial insti-

tutions rather than the people of Zimbabwe. That said, what is Mugabe doing that should raise the wrath of the Bush administration, while, when it comes to Mubarak, there is cautious diplomacy, cajoling and, at best, mild criticisms?

The hypocritical behavior of the Bush administration speaks, once again, to a large part of the reason that the U.S. has so little moral authority when it comes to international affairs.

The cynicism in the administration's behavior makes it impossible for any country to ever know what ground it stands on, but it is equally impossible for any supporters of democracy, human rights and national self-determination to believe an iota of the Bush rhetoric.

What, then, makes it so difficult for so many people in the USA to fail to see the repeated evidence of this hypocrisy?

Bill Fletcher Jr. is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit educational and organizing center.

## Blacks still in world of trouble on World AIDS Day

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Zaibaa Mahbi, a 16-year-old senior at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, D.C., is walking down the street on her cell phone when she gets some shocking news.

"I'm just having fun, first of all. I'm out walking down the street and all that," Mahbi recounts. "And I get a text message saying that my friend, one of my very close friends, went to a party and did something really stupid, got high and hooked up with some guy she hardly even knew and got the virus, HIV."

She continues, "When

you find out that someone close to you has AIDS... There's anger somehow. Anger at yourself and anger at that person, and you are so distraught because that one action led to that consequence and there's no turning back."

Fortunately, the street scene that Mahbi describes in an interview is not real, but a role she plays in a 60-second public service announcement that will begin airing across the country today, World AIDS Day, an annual international day of action on HIV and AIDS.

"Basically what it's trying to do is raise awareness and to help people to think before

they act, because people just follow their desires. They say, 'I want to do it right now,' but they don't think about what could happen," says Mahbi.

What is very real is the fact that Black teenage girls, the main target of the new PSA, are contracting HIV at alarming rates — in part, because of irresponsible sexual behavior after the use of drugs and alcohol, according to a report released this week from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the sponsor of the PSA.

"Although African-Americans ages 13-19 represent only 15 percent of U.S. teenagers, they accounted for

66 percent of new AIDS cases reported among teens in 2003," states the report. "That's 19 times the rate for White females and five times the rate for Hispanic females."

The report continues, "Particular HIV risk behaviors of this group, including sexual experimentation and drug abuse, are often influenced by strong peer group relationships and diminished parental involvement that can occur during adolescence."

The research report recommends drug addiction treatment, school and community-based outreach and

testing and counseling for HIV as among the most effective ways to reduce the risky behavior for teens and adults.

It also recommends:

- Research to understand the factors leading to disparities in HIV infection and survival rates among racial and ethnic minorities, particularly among African-Americans, taking into account age, gender, education, sexual identity, geographic region and socioeconomic status

- Studies to recommend culturally sensitive protective factors and culturally sensitive prevention interventions

- Scientific studies on how an individual's peers, relationships, social networks, and environment influence both drug abuse and sexual risk-taking

"Three key findings inform our approach, linking the interactions of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS in ways that extend far beyond injection drug use," the report states. "First, drug abuse impairs judgment and good decision making, leaving people more prone to engage in HIV risk behaviors, including risky sexual behavior and none adherence to HIV treatment. Second, drug abuse ad-

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driven by Black opposition to the war in Iraq. A recent, widely-cited NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found that only 2 percent of Blacks approved of Bush, while a Pew poll, appearing about the same time, had Blacks at a 12 percent approval rate. I tend to favor the latter as the more accurate one. But either way, this is really low, and Black opposition to the Iraq war, along with Katrina, account for most of it.

In one poll this year, Blacks were twice as negative as Whites about the American involvement in this war. Furthermore, Blacks account for 25 percent of the entire military, but so turned off are they about the war that they are a big reason why the Army, for example, is not achieving its recruiting goals. Five years ago, one in four recruits was Black, but now, one in seven is Black.

Hillary is not the only Democratic leader who has a "me, too" position. Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in the House has parted company with Murtha, and in a vote where the Republicans forced the hand of Democrats to put up or shut up on their view of whether the troops should be immediately yanked — you guessed it — they shut up.

Rep. Murtha's non-binding resolution that U.S. troops leave Iraq as soon as is practicable went down to a massive defeat (403-3), with the only holdouts three Democrats — Rep. Robert Wexler (Fla.), Rep. Cynthia McKinney (Ga.) and Rep. Jose Seranno (N.Y.) They alone had the guts to tell the people, the war should stop.

The administration is gambling to buy time for Iraqi troops to take hold and provide security, and for a real government will come into existence. Nothing we have seen suggests that will happen. So, the American people question whether our resources will be devoted to the extension of democracy and the rebuilding of the material infrastructure in the American Gulf or the Persian Gulf. The Republican-controlled Congress has the audacity to question who will rebuild the American disaster in New Orleans, Mississippi and Florida. The answer is obvious. Show the troops you love them by bringing them home; spend the money taking care of your own and stop the illusion that it is possible to win a military victory in a global "war on terror." Tell the people the truth.

Ron Walters is the director of the African-American Leadership Institute.

## AIDS

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antiretrovirals, to which a patient must turn if the first drugs fail.

And on-the-ground research suggests that, with common sense and basic safeguards, these drugs can be safely and properly used in poor countries.

That is a slap to those in Big Pharma who predicted that without advanced medical infrastructure to support them, these complex medications would fail or be abused. Another bit of good news is action on prevention, not just treatment.

Efforts to discourage infection through condom availability and other safe-sex programmes have helped bring down prevalence in Kenya and Zimbabwe, while the Caribbean, the second-most affected region in the world, was the only part of the planet where HIV incidence has not risen this year as compared with 2003.

And lab research into virus-killing microbicides is showing some promise, although it will be several years at least before this results in a safe and effective anti-HIV gel that could be used in sexual intercourse.

For all this, AIDS has its steely hooks deep into southern Africa.

Driven by intravenous drug use, it is spreading fast in parts of Eastern Europe.

And China and India, where ignorance of the virus is rampant, are feared to be on the brink of explosive HIV growth.

Even in rich countries, there is a worrying rise among young heterosexuals and gays, for whom the safe-sex message, in the reassuring era of antiretrovirals, is absent or has little impact.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria last week put out the begging bowl for 3.3 billion dollars to help meet needs of 7.1 billion dollars in 2006 and 2007. And this is just a fraction of what is needed. Globally, resource needs are put at 15 billion next year, 18 billion in 2007 and 22 billion in 2008.

"The AIDS pandemic is getting worse," said Genevieve Clark of the British AIDS charity The Terrence Higgins Trust.

"But there are pockets of good news, little glimmers of hope. The task is to learn from what works, and apply these lessons globally."