

INSIDE: CHILDREN OF THE DUST ● SORRY WE SHOT YOUR KID . . . HERE'S \$500 ● TWO IDEOLOGIES AND A FUNERAL ● YOUR LOCAL NEWS: DATELINE NEW DELHI

The ^{ColdType} **READER**

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 15 ● JUNE 2007



A MESSAGE FROM BRITAIN AS TONY BLAIR FINALLY QUILTS:

GOOD RIDDANCE!

ColdType The READER



ISSUE 15 | JUNE 2007

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GOOD RIDDANCE TO TONY BLAIR

BY FELICITY ARBUTHNOTT

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's long goodbye – don't break out the champagne just yet, he still has time to drag the country into another bloodbath; he doesn't actually go until June 27 – was typically stage managed.

Only the supinely faithful were allowed inside Trimdon Labour Club in his Sedgefield constituency in North East England. Sightings of Blair in this, his Parliamentary fiefdom, are as rare as total eclipses of the sun. His constituency work is done by his agent, John Burton. The centre of Sedgefield is the picture postcard English village and for photo-ops, unbeatable. In 2004 pictures of Blair and Bush having a casual pint in the ancient, beautiful Dun Cow Inn, with flowers cascading its honey coloured walls, under a cloudless sky, went around the world.

But, as always with Blair, reality told a different story. Sleepy Sedgefield, in the wilds of northern County Durham, had been under siege by US security operatives for weeks. They had searched 16th century listed buildings

and social housing alike, for weapons, sealed all the manhole covers, interrogated locals having a lazy pint in local pubs. When the great day came, those who had not left their homes before 8 a.m., had to stay there.

One regular drinker at the welcoming Inn on the Green, opposite the church which has withstood even Cromwell's civil war, said he had to get there before breakfast, or be housebound. (To be fair, there could be worse tragedies.) At the other end of the day, a manual worker said he had returned home exhausted, to find his road sealed by US personnel. He had to wait, allowed to go nowhere else, for several hours, before gaining access to his own home.

Back at the Dun Cow Inn, whose food and hospitality is exemplary, the Chef had been dismissed for the day, said locals, and the President's chef took over the kitchen for the 'casual' Blair and Bush sojourn in Blair's 'local'. He has not become known as 'phony Tony' for nothing.

When Reg Keys, who lost his twenty

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THE LONG GOODBYE

Not everyone was in Blair's thrall however, one woman said in despair: 'If they pinned a red rosette (the Labour emblem) on a donkey here, it would be elected ...'

one year old son, Tom, one of six military police killed at Al Majar in eastern Iraq, in June 2003, decided to run against Blair in the 2005 election, as an independent, the extent of the grip Blair and Burton had, was quickly apparent.

Finding a public building to hold public meetings, was nigh impossible, it had to be OK'd by Burton, as did nearly everything to do with 'free and democratic elections'. Not everyone was in Blair's thrall, however; one woman said in despair: "If they pinned a red rosette (the Labour emblem) on a donkey here, it would be elected ..."

"We only see him for photo-ops and elections," said another. One hotelier, owner of a welcoming old coaching inn, the Sedgefield Arms, put out a prominent sign in protest at Blair and at Bush's visit: "No politicians, no campaigners, no journalists," were welcome.

People's Prime Minister?

So Tony Blair pitched up for a rare sighting to say goodbye. He left in a motorcade to Northolt military airbase, west of London (ironically, where the body of Princess Diana was flown back ten years ago, the 'People's Princess,' as he told the nation, with wobbly lip, in his first year in office. A perfect opening act, as the 'People's Prime Minister.'))

He did triumph and wobbly combined in Sedgefield on May 10. His "political journey began and ended" there. He had "reached political maturity as the cold war was ending," he said.

Cynics might say he helped cause a new one, between faiths, of frightening

dimensions. He referred to his "social compassion" and desire to "help others." Domestically, he talked of his legacy being lowering of crime (try living in any gun strewn, knife infested UK inner city); rising jobs (as work bases are sold off or outsourced to everywhere from Eastern Europe to India); health (the towering legacy of the National Health Service, free at access, being privatised by the week, in danger of excluding the poorest from its proud ethos); education (the highest illiteracy and innumeracy rate in Western Europe); culture; values (highest teenage pregnancies in Western Europe) and on and on. Maternity leave and equalities which he claimed as his own had, in fact, been European Union directives.

Northern Ireland had been sorted (just days before – I wonder what socket wrenching, arm twisting brought that about?) and under his leadership Britain had won the 2012 Olympics (the terrorists Blair and Bush's years have created, across the globe must be rubbing their hands in anticipation, at that triumph.)

The mention of the tragedy of July 7, the day after the Olympic announcement, a word to the bereaved, in an incident which may well have been the result of the attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan (since a public enquiry has been refused, there are no certainties) was not in the script.

Then finally the elephant in the corner emerged. "After 11th September 2001," he "decided to stand shoulder to shoulder with our oldest ally." What 9/11 had to do with the invasion of two

sovereign countries (since there has never been a claim of Afghans or Iraqis on any of the planes) was, as ever, not explained. He continued blithely that: “Removing Saddam and his sons from power, as with the Taliban” – the CIA’s creation – “was over with relative ease.” No mention of Saddam’s 15-year-old grandson also slaughtered, US style – and from this man who is a qualified barrister, sworn to uphold the law; no mention of the immensities of illegalities of historic proportions.

Ultimate terrorists

There had been a “blowback ... from global terrorism,” resulting from the invasions he said, without irony. Can he really not know that for much of the world, Britain and the US are perceived as the ultimate terrorists, the rogue states? And not a nod, either, towards the families of the soldiers killed and the hundreds of injured he has never visited, in these invasions built on lies, deceit, dodgy dossiers and weapons of mass destruction which Britain and America knew did not exist. They, after all, were the main providers of Iraq’s original weapons and knew exactly what had been accounted for. It was “outsiders” destroying Iraq, said Blair (read: “chaos nothing to do with us.”) “Outsiders?” Breathtaking.

“Hand on my heart, I did what I thought was right,” he said – twice. Shameless.

Outside were two more ‘elephants’ – in orange jump suits. Abu Baker Deghaye’s brother Omar has languished in Guantanamo, uncharged for five years. He and his partner, Luci Car-

olan have campaigned tirelessly against Guantanamo and the Iraq invasion. As the world’s media queued to interview them, the vast police presence did their best to keep them from marring Blair’s triumphant exit (“Apparently there is a dress code in Trimdon and we’ve failed it,” said Carolan) though the police were seen struggling to retain composure as Abu Baker raised his megaphone and yelled: “Come on out, Tony Blair, the police have the building surrounded, you are wanted for war crimes.”

As Blair was about to leave, a hearse carrying former Labour party activist Maisy Thomas to her place of rest, passed the building. As he emerged, to shake hands with the faithful, the staff in Trimdon Labour Club were clearing the room for her wake. It was a fitting metaphor for the disaster of the Blair years for Britain, but above all his legacy: the bodies piled from the Balkans to Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq. Incidentally, even the ‘Trimdon’ faithful were seemingly phony.

Blair’s photo-op in Sedgefield lasted under an hour then he was off again, to cozy up to his pal, the ultra right, anti-Muslim, French President elect, Nicolas Sarkozy.

Media comments

The media, left right or centre, were not kind to Tony Blair’s long walk into the sunset. “A legacy written in blood,” was the heading in the left’s Morning Star, which quoted Symon Hill of the Campaign Against the Arms Trade: “Tony Blair came to power promoting an ‘ethical foreign policy.’ Ten years later, he leaves office mired in blood and sleaze.”

‘Hand on my heart, I did what I thought was right’ he said – twice. Shameless

THE LONG GOODBYE

'He regularly lied to Parliament and the public. Before Blair, lying to Parliament was an instantly resignable offence

The latter referred to the latest sleaze he is the first Prime Minister to be interviewed by the police in a criminal enquiry into whether he had sold peerages in exchange for Party donations. Some political commentators feel it not impossible that his whole inner circle might be involved and might also find themselves in court

Last bow

Quentin Letts, witty political commentator of the right-of-centre Daily Mail headed his piece: "Tony, our doomed Hamlet, takes a last bow." He was particularly engaged by Blair: "... wearing a lot of makeup (which) had turned that slightly yellow hue..." When the final lines: "This country is a blessed nation... This is the greatest country on earth," rang out, Letts writes: "Sick bowls. At the double, please!" His colleague, the astute Peter Osborne, wrote that in the country's history, never has politics "been so lovingly stage managed," adding, "He regularly lied to Parliament and the public. Before Blair, lying to Parliament was an instantly resignable offence... No other Prime Minister has ever taken office with such advantages and good will. Yet he squandered every last jot," concludes Osborne.

"It's the final curtain for old lyin' eyes," wrote Richard Littlejohn, in the same paper. While heavy weight commentator Max Hastings, formerly of the Telegraph, the journalist who carried the British flag into Port Stanley in the Falklands war, has lately taken against Blair's wars, heading his column: "How Blair became addicted to

taking us to war." The paper's editorial column wrote of a political dream, "that turned to ashes."

In the Guardian, commentator Tareq Ali said, "Mr. Blair has done more damage to British interests in the Middle East than Anthony Eden, who led the UK to disaster in Suez 50 years ago." In his article, "Adieu, Blair, Adieu," Ali called him: "a crafty, avaricious politician... exiting against a backdrop of car bombs and mass carnage, with hundreds of thousands dead or maimed from his policies and London a prime target for terrorist attack."

"Haunted by Iraq," is how historian Anthony Howard designated Blair's legacy in the Independent and, in the same paper, the irrepressible and astute Matthew Norman wrote possibly the ultimate political obituary, "a dangerous charming rogue... was (he) blasé about lying, or the classic sociopath who believed his words were true, since they came from his mouth?"

He added, "So it was that the trinity of his psychological flaws – the pathological craving for attention, exhibited since toddlerhood; the monomaniacal certainty of his own wisdom and moral rectitude... utterly amoral disregard for the facts... he leaves a trail of ruins" constitutionally and globally. Ouch.

In the Middle East, for the Jordan Times, Jonathon Power wrote, "The era of Tony Blair and George Bush will be remembered for one thing.. the world went backwards on human rights after fifty years of steady advance'. Change should ensure that 'tyranny is kept in check, that liberty and justice prevail and that the strong do not trample on

the weak and vulnerable.”

As Blair announced his departure (pushed, it has been reported, by a finally desperate Party after his support for the bombardment of Lebanon) David Keogh, a parliamentary researcher and Leo O'Connor a journalist, were jailed for six months for their part in passing a classified paper to an anti war MP, detailing a conversation between George Bush and Tony Blair, on the April 16, 2004, when, it is alleged, they discussed the bombing of Al Jazeera, in US ally Qatar. The truth tellers are jailed and – so far – those who have done nothing but the opposite, walk free.

Sir Roderick Braithwaite, former Senior Advisor to Blair wrote (in the Financial Times on August 2, 2006) that there were senior diplomats in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and those in the Ministry of Defence who: “would not be too upset if (Blair) was tried as a war criminal.”

There was a lone cheerleader for Blair in London the day after he announced his resignation, Iraq’s ‘President’ Jalal Talabani, who hailed him as

a ‘hero’ – but, as others in the corrupt puppet government, the British and US troops are all that stand between his head and his shoulders.

Antiwar MP, George Galloway, who also hosts a radio programme, told his listeners on Trimdon day, that he had ordered an eco friendly car and told the dealer to paint it black, “The colour of Blair’s heart.”

On the same day BBC Radio 5 did an unofficial poll of the reactions of their listeners. Seventy two percent of their comments were summed up succinctly by one listener, who emailed, “Good riddance.”

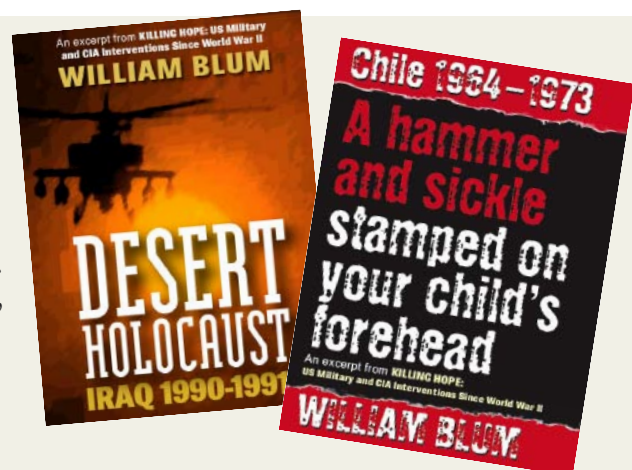
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Felicity Arbuthnot is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She has written and broadcast on Iraq, her coverage of which was nominated for several awards. She was also senior researcher for John Pilger’s award-winning documentary, Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq; and author, with Nikki van der Gaag, of Baghdad, in the ‘Great Cities’ series, for World Almanac Books (2006.)

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CANADA'S ROLE IN THE WAR ON TERROR

BY LINDA McQUAIG

We've moved from being a nation that has championed internationalism, the United Nations and UN peacekeeping to being a key prop to an aggressive U.S. administration operating outside the constraints of international law

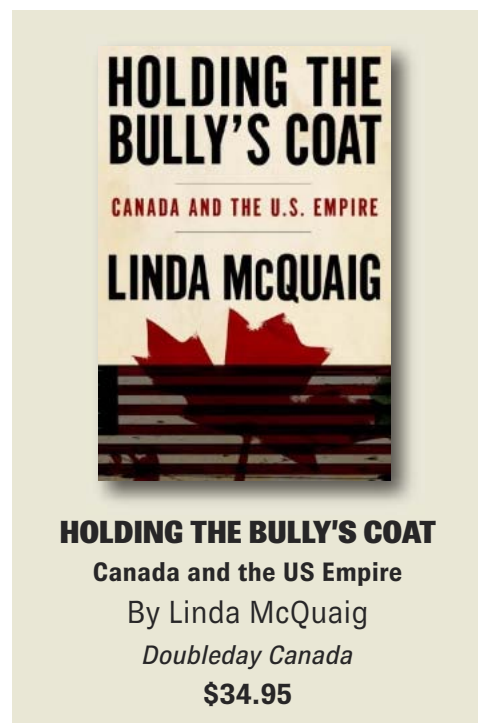
Excerpted from **Holding the Bully's Coat**, by Linda McQuaig. Copyright © 2007 Linda McQuaig. Published by Doubleday Canada. Reproduced by arrangement with the publisher. All rights reserved

The following essay is the introduction to Linda McQuaig's new book, Holding The Bully's Coat: Canada and the US Empire:

Although it received almost no attention in the Canadian media, the appointment of Gen. Bantz Craddock as NATO's top military commander in December 2006 had a significance for Canadians.

Craddock had been in charge of the U.S.'s notorious Guantánamo Bay prison in Cuba, where hundreds of suspected terrorists have been stripped of their most basic human rights in defiance of international law. His appointment as NATO's military chief meant that Canadian troops serving in the NATO mission in Afghanistan were being brought under the ultimate command of a U.S. general deeply connected to the worst aspects of American foreign policy carried out in the name of defeating "terror."

This development should help dispel the comforting notion that Canada has stayed clear of the reckless and illegal



course embarked on by the administration of George W. Bush in the post-9/11 era. In fact, there has been a significant shift in how Canada operates in the world, as we've moved from being a nation that has championed internationalism, the United Nations and UN peacekeeping to being a key prop to an

aggressive U.S. administration operating outside the constraints of international law.

In his book *Lawless World*, Philippe Sands, a law professor at University College London, describes the actions of the Bush administration as amounting to “a full-scale assault, a war on law.” This rejection of the rule of law and the global rules created following the Second World War has freed up a boisterous crowd of neoconservatives operating within the U.S. administration to unabashedly pursue policies aimed at enhancing America’s global dominance. The administration’s plans, the Wall Street Journal noted in March 2005, envision “a military that is far more proactive, *focused on changing the world* instead of just responding to conflicts” (italics added). The distinguished U.S. journalist Mary McGrory captured this aggressive U.S. behaviour colourfully in a column in the Washington Post when she described America as the “SUV of nations. It hogs the road and guzzles the gas and periodically has to run over something – such as another country – to get to its Middle Eastern filling station.”

As Canada has backed this SUV of nations as it goes about changing the world to suit its own needs, Ottawa has repositioned Canada in the world, with implications for us as Canadians. Our close alignment with Washington also has implications beyond our borders. It is fashionable in Canadian media circles to denigrate the importance of Canada as a world player and scoff at the idea that anything we do would matter one way or another. But in fact

we are a player of some significance on the global stage, owing to our reputation – partly deserved and partly undeserved – as a fair arbiter and promoter of just causes, as a decent sort of country. By lining itself up so uncritically with Washington, even as the Bush administration has become a renegade in the world and highly unpopular on its own home turf, the Canadian government has played a role in enabling a regime that is considered by many around the world to be the major obstacle to peace and security.

The government of Stephen Harper has come to the aid of the beleaguered White House, which has become more and more isolated as it pursues its “war on terror.” On the eve of a NATO summit in Latvia in late November 2006, the growing reticence among NATO allies about the mission in Afghanistan came out into the open, with Belgian defence minister André Flahaut calling for “an exit strategy.” Flahaut gave voice to a view that had been gaining strength in Europe and elsewhere: “The situation is deteriorating,” he noted, “and, over time, NATO forces risk appearing like an army of occupation.” But with European support flagging, Canada stepped forward to defend the war, pressuring other NATO countries to make Afghanistan the top priority, and berating them for their reluctance to beef up their troop commitments. Harper’s strident advocacy has been very useful to the Bush administration, since it allows the voice of another country – and one that has considerable international legitimacy – to make the case for America’s war. This leaves the White

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BOOK EXCERPT

It's worth recalling how keenly Harper supported the invasion, and how he publicly rebuked the Canadian government – even in front of U.S. audiences – for failing to participate in it

House looking less isolated, to both the world community and the domestic American audience.

In tilting so strongly towards Washington, Ottawa has moved us further and further away from our European allies, with whom we actually have a great deal in common. While we are always reminded of how similar we are to Americans, there's been a tendency to overlook the compelling similarities between Canadian and European society. As Canadian political scientist Philip Resnick has argued, Canada “would fit remarkably well into the European Union, were it located on the European continent.”

Indeed, there are similarities between Canada and Europe in our desire for strong social programs, our aspirations for greater social equality and our desire to move towards a world of peaceful co-existence among nations. Meanwhile, America has become an intensely unequal society, and one that is focused on decisively crushing its enemies in the world. Resnick also notes that Canadians share with Europeans a self-doubt, and a sense of limitations and the need for compromise in politics, while the Americans plow ahead with a fierce certainty about themselves and their rightful place at the centre of the world.

All this suggests that Canada could be making common cause with the Europeans on many fronts – on strengthening our social welfare systems, on championing collective international efforts to combat climate change and on standing united in opposition to U.S. actions that violate international law.

Canada could have, for instance, joined the European Union in June 2006 in calling for the closure of Guantánamo Bay. Instead, however, we have lined up ever more closely with Washington, even embracing the notion of fencing ourselves off from the world behind the tight security boundaries of a “Fortress North America.” Our ties with Europe, once actively cultivated in Ottawa, have been largely left untended. Inside the Canadian government, there's been a significant diversion of focus and resources away from Europe and towards the United States.

This growing closeness to the United States has crept up on many Canadians a little unexpectedly. Indeed, in the past few years, most Canadians have taken satisfaction in the decision, made by the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien in February 2003, not to send Canadian troops to participate in Bush's “coalition of the willing” in the invasion of Iraq. As the U.S. invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq has turned into a debacle of momentous proportions, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and more than three thousand U.S. troops, the Chrétien government's decision has proved extremely popular among Canadians. There's been a tendency to forget that, at the time, some of our leading political figures – including our current prime minister, Stephen Harper – actively favoured the U.S. invasion and encouraged our participation.

It's worth recalling how keenly Harper supported the invasion, and how he publicly rebuked the Canadian government – even in front of U.S. au-

diences – for failing to participate in it. In a letter published in the Wall Street Journal in March 2003, Harper and Stockwell Day, now minister of public safety, sharply criticized Chrétien’s decision not to join the “coalition of the willing,” presenting it as a treacherous failure of loyalty to Britain and the U.S. “This is a serious mistake. For the first time in history, the Canadian government has not stood beside its key British and American allies in their time of need.” The next month, Harper told U.S. TV network Fox News that he endorsed the war, as did most Canadians outside Quebec. “Outside of Quebec, I believe very strongly the silent majority of Canadians is strongly supportive.”

It was only later, when the war became extremely unpopular and began to look unwinnable, that Harper started to back off. Appearing on CTV’s Question Period in April 2004, Harper said that Canada lacked the military capacity to become involved, and that if he were elected prime minister he would not send troops to Iraq.

Since becoming prime minister in February 2006, Harper has put Canada on a course that has been most helpful to the Bush administration. Although Canada has not sent troops to Iraq, it has become a leading contributor to another prong of Washington’s “war on terror” – the war in Afghanistan. Launched by Washington in October 2001, that war is now carried out largely under the auspices of NATO, with the approval of the UN Security Council. But it remains very much Washington’s war. Washington has long dominated

NATO, and U.S. troops make up the bulk of the NATO force in Afghanistan, with an additional eight thousand U.S. soldiers serving there under a separate U.S. command. The war embodies the worst aspects of Bush’s “war on terror,” and is increasingly coming to resemble the disastrous and failed war in Iraq, with its emphasis on hunting down and killing radical Islamic insurgents.

While the war is often defended as beneficial to Afghanistan, it has become harder and harder to make this case. Violence and civilian deaths rose dramatically in 2006. As the insurgency grew in strength, the NATO force responded with devastating air strikes. According to U.S.-based Human Rights Watch, an estimated 1,000 civilians were killed in 2006 in the southern Panjwai district. In one instance, when nine people were killed in a NATO attack on the village of Ashogha, west of Kandahar city, a NATO investigation concluded that the attack was “within the rules of engagement and the village was a legitimate target.” Legitimate to whom? It’s easy to see how this sort of behaviour has alienated Afghans and made the NATO force seem to them like an army of occupation, not all that different from the Soviet army they fought in the 1980s. Even Afghan president Hamid Karzai, a close ally of Washington’s, openly wept on national television in December 2006 as he described his inability to protect the Afghan people from violence by the U.S. and NATO, as well as by the Taliban insurgents. “We can’t prevent the [NATO] coalition from bombing the terrorists,” he said, “and our children are

Even Afghan president Hamid Karzai, a close ally of Washington’s, openly wept on national television in December 2006 as he described his inability to protect the Afghan people from violence by the U.S. and NATO, as well as by the Taliban insurgents

BOOK EXCERPT

There is no evidence that Canada's embrace of this war is what Canadians want. Polls have shown that Canadians are increasingly wary of our involvement in Afghanistan and more broadly of aligning Canada too closely with the United States

dying because of that.”

Canada's tilting towards the foreign policies of the Bush administration was already under way under Paul Martin, who replaced Chrétien as Liberal prime minister in December 2003 and who emphasized from the outset his desire for more harmonious relations with Washington. To highlight this more pro-Washington approach, the Martin government prepared a defence policy review in April 2005 that emphasized the integration of the Canadian and U.S. militaries. “Today our ships integrate seamlessly with U.S. Navy formations,” the review noted enthusiastically. The review also showed that Canada had adopted Bush's view of the world, claiming that “failed states” and “weapons of mass destruction” had made the world dangerous to Canadians: “Most of the new dangers to the United States are no less risks to Canada.” In fact, there was little reason to make such a claim, other than to encourage the notion that a common vulnerability tied Canada and the United States together. It was also the Martin government that in 2005 approved the redeployment of Canadian troops in Afghanistan from the Kabul district, where they were largely involved in peacekeeping, to the southeastern region, where they have been fighting insurgents and contributing to the broader U.S. “war on terror.”

It should be mentioned that this “war on terror,” in addition to being an aggressive war fought outside the rules of international law, is also based on an over-hyped threat. U.S. political scientist John Mueller has noted that, even

including the September 11 victims, the number of Americans killed by international terrorism since the late 1960s (when the State Department began keeping count) is about the same as the number of Americans killed during the same period by lightning, accidents caused by deer or by severe allergic reactions to peanuts. It has also been observed that far more Americans die each year from obesity than from terrorism. Of course, unlike these other causes of death, terrorism is an external threat, and we should take the appropriate measures to protect ourselves against it. But we shouldn't allow fear of terrorism to remake our lives and our society.

As Toronto criminal lawyer Clayton Ruby astutely observed:

“There is a marked parallel between the ‘war on communism’ that warped the economic, military, political and emotional life of the last half of the last century, and the ‘war on terror’ presently on offer at much the same price by much the same people.”

There is no evidence that Canada's embrace of this war is what Canadians want. Polls have shown that Canadians are increasingly wary of our involvement in Afghanistan and more broadly of aligning Canada too closely with the United States.

The Harper government has managed to deflect some of the public dissatisfaction over its increasingly militarized pro-Washington stance by portraying any criticism of our Afghan role as a failure to “support the troops.” But support for the troops isn't the issue. The legitimacy of the war — and

Canada's involvement in it – is the issue. And it is ludicrous to suggest that criticism of a government decision to commit our troops to war amounts to criticism of the troops, whose job it is to carry out government orders. The government is clearly hoping to shield itself from such criticism by hiding behind the troops, trying to make Canadians feel that any condemnation of the government smacks of ingratitude for the enormous sacrifices Canadian soldiers are being called upon to make.

This approach, so reminiscent of the Bush administration's own flag-pumping jingoism, has been helped along by the Canadian media. To a surprising extent, the media have taken on the role of championing the war effort to Canadians, as if they were cheering on the home team in a sports match. Nikolai Lanine, a veteran of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, has compared the Canadian media's upbeat, ever-supportive coverage of the war to the Soviet coverage two decades ago. "The Canadian media coverage seemed like an echo of the Soviet press," commented Lanine, now a resident of Victoria, B.C. Citing comforting phrases from the Canadian media suggesting the military situation is improving and that development is under way, Lanine wrote, "I have heard this all before . . . Like the Soviet – Afghan war, this one is fought in the name of state security, a peaceful Afghanistan, and women's rights.

Canadians fight the same people the Soviets fought between 1979 and 1989: 'terrorists, extremists, insurgents and bandits.' This should make sense, ex-

cept that, in the 1980s today's Taliban were supported by the West as 'freedom fighters.'"

The disturbing notion of the media as war promoter is reflected in a statement made by the Canadian Journalism Foundation, a private organization that describes itself as dedicated to promoting "excellence in Canadian journalism." It's an odd sort of excellence the foundation seems to have in mind. In the late fall of 2006, it organized a public forum to address what it saw as baffling – the lack of public support for the war effort. In a release promoting the event, the foundation praised the media for "doing a credible job of reporting on the importance of Canada's role in the military operation." (Shouldn't the media be expected to do a credible job of reporting the facts of the war, and let Canadians decide for themselves the importance – and legitimacy – of Canada's role?) Yet, the foundation noted, Canadian public support for the war remained low, prompting the foundation to ask: "What's the disconnect?"

But is there any disconnect? Canadians are skeptical and even disapproving of the war – despite the enthusiastic and inappropriate cheerleading of many in our media. I suspect that's because Canadians have a sense of what they want Canada to stand for in the world, and attacking villages in faraway places as part of a broader U.S. campaign focused on changing the world isn't part of it. **CT**

Linda McQuaig's previous book was It's The Crude, Dude: War, Big Oil and the Fight for the Planet,

Canadians are skeptical and even disapproving of the war – despite the enthusiastic and inappropriate cheerleading of many in our media

CAR-NAGE

BY GEORGE MONBIOT

By noisily volunteering to subject themselves to stricter standards, the corporations try to pre-empt the rules which might otherwise have been imposed on them

Corporate social responsibility often resembles the adventures of The Good Soldier Svejk. In 1914, about to be conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army, Svejk puts on his old uniform and a volunteer's buttonhole and, waving his borrowed crutches and shouting "to Belgrade, to Belgrade!", has his landlady push him to the recruiting office in a bath chair. Jaroslav Harsek's marvelous creation is lauded by the newspapers for his extraordinary patriotism.

By this means, Svejk attempts to persuade the authorities that he is doing everything he can to get to the front, even if, to his enormous regret, his rheumatism prevents him from having his brains blown out. By noisily volunteering to subject themselves to stricter standards, the corporations try to pre-empt the rules which might otherwise have been imposed on them. This, they hope, will allow them to participate only when and how they see fit.

In Svejk's case it didn't work. His patriotism was rewarded with enemas and emetics until his rheumatism was

miraculously cured. The corporations, on the other hand, always seem to persuade the authorities of their undying commitment to the causes they espouse, which ensures that they can enter the war on their own terms.

This seems to be the way that the global campaign on road safety is going.

Death and injury on the roads is the world's most neglected public health issue. Almost as many people die in road accidents – 1.2 million a year – as are killed by malaria or tuberculosis. Around 50 million are injured. Some 85% of these accidents take place in developing countries. The poor get hurt much more often than the rich, as they walk or cycle or travel in overloaded buses. The highest death rate is among children walking on the roads.

The annual economic cost to developing countries, in lost productivity alone, is \$65-100bn: roughly the same as the amount they receive in foreign aid. I caught a glimpse of the human cost when I was hospitalised in northern Kenya. Some of the men on the

ward had bullet or axe wounds inflicted in tribal wars; others were dying of AIDS; but over half the patients had been smashed up in road accidents. They could not afford good painkillers, and sobbed and screamed through the night. It looked like a scene from the First World War.

The problem is likely to become much worse. By 2020, according to the World Bank, deaths from road accidents are likely to fall by 28% in rich nations, but to rise by 83% in poorer ones. By 2030, they will overtake the deaths caused by malaria. But while \$1.9bn of foreign aid will be spent on tackling malaria over the next five years, the annual global aid budget for road safety is less than \$10m.

Price of doing business?

This issue has been neglected partly because it is something the rich inflict on the poor, and partly because it is widely perceived as an unavoidable price of doing business: as the global transportation industry expands, so must its human costs. Governments are just beginning to wake up to the problem. But the corporations got there first.

In 1999, at the invitation of the World Bank, the motor and oil companies joined something called the Global Road Safety Partnership. It was supposed to bring together “governments and governmental agencies, the private sector and civil society organisations.” But its executive committee contains no one from a civil society organisation and only two representatives of government. BP, Total, DaimlerChrysler,

General Motors, Michelin and Volvo, however, are all represented.

Professor Ian Roberts at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine compared the prevalence of certain words in the partnership’s annual reports to their prevalence in a similar report written by the World Health Organisation (WHO). In the partnership’s reports, he found a pattern of systematic neglect of pedestrians and cyclists. In the WHO’s report, “speed limit” occurred 17 times in every 10,000 words; in the partnership’s reports, just once. “Pedestrian” was used 69 times by the WHO, and 15 times by the partnership; “buses” and “cyclists” were mentioned 13 and 32 times respectively by the WHO, and not once by the partnership. “Reclaiming the streets for walking and cycling,” he notes, “will not serve the interests of the car makers.”

Instead, the Global Road Safety Partnership emphasised better training for drivers and better safety education for children. These measures do not interfere with the commercial interests of the transport industry. Neither, according to peer-reviewed papers Professor Roberts cites, do they work.

The motor industry also appears to dominate the most prominent international body on road safety. Three weeks ago, the racing driver Michael Schumacher wrote a column – quite a good one – for the Guardian to mark Global Road Safety Week. He described himself as a member of the “independent Commission for Global Road Safety.” The Commission launched the Make Roads Safe campaign, which is modelled on Make Poverty History. But

While \$1.9bn of foreign aid will be spent on tackling malaria over the next five years, the annual global aid budget for road safety is less than \$10m

Is this the vision: that the space now used by pedestrians and cyclists and oxcarts and rickshaws is surrendered to car drivers? If so, it might reduce fatalities, but it would also represent a classic act of enclosure, through which the rich are able to secure the resources of the poor

how “independent” is it?

It was established by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) Foundation, which is run by motoring and motor sports associations. Of the eight commissioners, one is an executive of General Motors; one runs the Bridgestone Tyre Corporation; one is a trustee of the FIA Foundation; one is chairman of the FIA Foundation and a president of the Automobile Club of Italy; and one is Michael Schumacher. The Commission's secretary is the director-general of the FIA Foundation.

Its report is better than the material published by the Global Road Safety Partnership. There is more emphasis on speed limits, road design and traffic management. But there are some odd gaps and contradictions. It complains that “participation by middle and low income countries in the existing international road safety organisations . . . is low” and that there is a “lack of ownership” of road safety programmes by the governments and people of developing countries.

So why do all its own members come from the G8 nations? The Commission prescribes an “action plan” for global road safety, to be run by something called the Global Road Safety Facility. This – surprise, surprise – also

turns out to have been launched and partly funded by the FIA Foundation.

Most importantly, it calls for the developing nations to follow the path taken by richer countries in reducing deaths and injuries. But at no point does it mention that much of this reduction was the result of cyclists and pedestrians being driven off the roads. This is a much bigger issue for poor nations – where the great majority of people who use roads do not own cars – than for rich ones. Is this the vision: that the space now used by pedestrians and cyclists and oxcarts and rickshaws is surrendered to car drivers? If so, it might reduce fatalities, but it would also represent a classic act of enclosure, through which the rich are able to secure the resources of the poor.

Michael Schumacher is in danger of finding himself in the same position as Bob Geldof: a celebrity who claims to speak for the poor and weak, but who is informed and guided by the powerful. We need a global campaign on road safety, but it must belong to the people on whose behalf it acts. **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book is Heat (Doubleday Canada). This article originally appeared in the London newspaper, The Guardian.

Read an excerpt from George Monbiot's book

THE AGE OF DISSENT: A MANIFESTO FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER

at www.coldtype.net/archives.html

YOUR LOCAL NEWS: DATELINE NEW DELHI

BY BARBARA EHRENREICH

The world may be flat, as New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman has written, but I always liked to think I was standing on a hill. Now comes the news that pasadenanow.com, a local news site, is recruiting reporters in India. The website's editor points out that he can get two Indian reporters for a mere \$20,800 a year – and no, they won't be commuting from New Delhi. Since Pasadena's city council meetings can be observed on the web, the Indian reporters will be able to cover local politics from half the planet away. And if they ever feel a need to see the potholes of Pasadena, there's always Google Earth.

Excuse me, but isn't this more or less what former New York Times reporter Jayson Blair was fired for – pretending to report from sites around the country while he was actually holed up in his Brooklyn apartment? Or will pasadenanow.com be honest enough to give its new reporters datelines in Delhi (or wherever they live)?

I should have seen it coming. In the

eighties, US companies began outsourcing the manufacturing of everything from garments to steel, leaving whole cities to die. Education was the recommended solution for the unemployed because, in the globalized future, Americans would be world's brains, while Mexicans and Malaysians would provide the hands. Let the low-end, repetitive jobs scatter to the ends of the earth, we were told – the intellectual and creative work would stay right here.

So no one really complained when the back office and call center jobs migrated to India in the nineties: Who needed them? We would still be the brains of global business. When the IT jobs started drifting away, we were at first assured that only the more "routine" ones were outsourceable. As for all the laid-off techies, they were smart enough to develop new skills, right?

But no one can pretend any longer that we have a global monopoly on intellect and innovation. Look at the "telemedicine" trend, which has radiologists in India and Lebanon reading CT

No one really complained when the back office and call center jobs migrated to India in the nineties: Who needed them? We would still be the brains of global business

I just wish the next time some managers get the idea of cost-saving through outsourcing they'd go for the CEO's job. That's where the big bucks are

scans for hospitals in Altoona and Chicago. Or – and this was never supposed to happen – the growing outsourcing of R&D, with scores of companies opening labs in India or China – “Chindia,” as they are known in the biz lit. In 2005, a Microsoft manager told the Financial Times that “The question is how you make [the Chinese] truly creative, truly innovative.” Whoops – weren't we supposed to be the innovators?

Still, writing was believed to be safe – the last stronghold of Western creativity. Explaining the outsourcing of almost every newspaper function, including copy-editing, the billionaire CEO of a consortium of Irish newspapers wrote: “With the exception of the magic of writing and editing news ... almost every other function, except printing, is location-indifferent.” But the magic has clearly been fading, starting two years ago when Reuters started outsourcing its Wall Street coverage to Bangalore. Is there nothing an actual, on-site, American can't do better than anyone else?

In the Pasadena case, I can't even complain, as US-based Reuters' workers did when their jobs were outsourced, that the quality of journalism

will suffer as a result.

One of the Indian reporters just hired by pasadenanow.com has a degree from the Graduate School of Journalism at UC Berkeley, which is one of the three or four best j-schools in the country. I have taught there myself, and know that the students are scarily smart. Too bad that they these reporters couldn't get real journalism jobs, at normal American wages, but American newspapers are axing good journalists even as I write.

No, I don't resent the Indians for moving in on the kind of work I do. I just wish the next time some managers get the idea of cost-saving through outsourcing they'd go for the CEO's job. That's where the big bucks are, and there's no reason to think a Chinese or Indian person couldn't do a CEO's work, whatever it may be, perfectly adequately, and at less than a tenth of the price. As for me, I'm retraining as a massage therapist, at least until they figure out how to do that from Mumbai. **CT**

Barbara Ehrenreich is the author of 13 books, most recently Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream.

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JOHN PILGER GOES TO WAR

BY PABLO NAVARRETE

John Pilger is an award-winning journalist, author and documentary filmmaker, who began his career in 1958 in his homeland, Australia, before moving to London in the 1960s. He has been a foreign correspondent and a front-line war reporter, beginning with the Vietnam War in 1967. He is an impassioned critic of foreign military and economic adventures by Western governments.

“It is too easy,” Pilger says, “for Western journalists to see humanity in terms of its usefulness to ‘our’ interests and to follow government agendas that ordain good and bad tyrants, worthy and unworthy victims and present ‘our’ policies as always benign when the opposite is usually true. It’s the journalist’s job, first of all, to look in the mirror of his own society.”

Pilger also believes a journalist ought to be a guardian of the public memory and often quotes Milan Kundera: “The struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

In a career that has produced more than 55 television documentaries, Pil-

ger’s first major film for the cinema, *The War on Democracy*, will be released in the United Kingdom this month. Pilger spent several weeks filming in Venezuela and *The War on Democracy* contains an exclusive interview with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

PN: Could you begin by telling us what your new film ‘The War on Democracy’ is about?

JP: I happened to watch George Bush’s second inauguration address in which he pledged to “bring democracy to the world.” He mentioned the words “democracy” and “liberty” twenty one times. It was a very important speech because, unlike the purple prose of previous presidents (Ronald Reagan excluded), he left no doubt that he was stripping noble concepts like “democracy” and “liberty” of their true meaning – government, for, by and of the people.

I wanted to make a film that illuminated this disguised truth – that the United States has long waged a war on democracy behind a facade of propa-

“It’s the journalist’s job, first of all, to look in the mirror of his own society”

"In Bolivia, the recent, tumultuous past is told through quite remarkable testimony from ordinary people, including those who fought against the piracy of their resources"

ganda designed to contort the intellect and morality of Americans and the rest of us. For many of your readers, this is known. However, for others in the West, the propaganda that has masked Washington's ambitions has been entrenched, with its roots in the incessant celebration of World War Two, the "good war", then "victory" in the cold war. For these people, the "goodness" of US power represents "us." Thanks to Bush and his cabal, and to Blair, the scales have fallen from millions of eyes. I would like "The War on Democracy" to contribute something to this awakening.

The film is about the power of empire and of people. It was shot in Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile, and the United States and is set also in Guatemala and Nicaragua. It tells the story of "America's backyard," the dismissive term given to all of Latin America. It traces the struggle of indigenous people first against the Spanish, then against European immigrants who reinforced the old elite. Our filming was concentrated in the barrios where the continent's "invisible people" live in hillside shanties that defy gravity. It tells, above all, a very positive story: that of the rise of popular social movements that have brought to power governments promising to stand up to those who control national wealth and to the imperial master. Venezuela has taken the lead, and a highlight of the film is a rare face-to-face interview with President Hugo Chavez whose own developing political consciousness, and sense of history (and good humour), are evident. The film investigates the 2002 coup d'etat

against Chavez and casts it in a contemporary context. It also describes the differences between Venezuela and Cuba, and the shift in economic and political power since Chavez was first elected. In Bolivia, the recent, tumultuous past is told through quite remarkable testimony from ordinary people, including those who fought against the piracy of their resources. In Chile, the film looks behind the mask of this apparently modern, prosperous "model" democracy and finds powerful, active ghosts. In the United States, the testimony of those who ran the "backyard" echo those who run that other backyard, Iraq; sometimes they are the same people. Chris Martin (my fellow director) and I believe "The War on Democracy" is well timed. We hope people will see it as another way of seeing the world: as a metaphor for understanding a wider war on democracy and the universal struggle of ordinary people, from Venezuela to Vietnam, Palestine to Guatemala.

PN: As you say, Latin America has often been described as the U.S.' backyard. How important is Latin America for the U.S. in the global context?

JP: Latin America's strategic importance is often dismissed. That's because it is so important. Read Greg Grandin's recent, excellent history, *Empire's Workshop*, (I interview him in the film) in which he makes the case that Latin America has been Washington's "workshop" for developing and honing and rewarding its imperial impulses elsewhere. For example, when the US "re-

treated” from Southeast Asia, where did its “democracy builders” go to reclaim their “vision”? Latin America. The result was the murderous assaults on Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, and the darkness of “Operation Condor” in the southern cone. This was Ronald Reagan’s “war on terror”, which of course was a war of terror that provided basic training for those now running the Bush/Cheney “long war” in the Middle East and elsewhere.

PN: Noam Chomsky recently said that after five centuries of European conquests, Latin America was reasserting its independence. Do you agree with this?

JP: Yes, I agree. It’s humbling for someone coming from prosperous Europe to witness the poorest taking charge of their lives, with people rarely asking, as we in the West often ask, “What can I do?” They know what to do. In Cochabamba, Bolivia, the population barricaded their city until they began to take control of their water. In El Alto, perhaps the poorest city on the continent, people stood against a repressive regime until it fell. This is not to suggest that complete independence has been won. Venezuela’s economy, for example, is still very much a “neo-liberal” economy that continues to reward those with capital. The changes made under Chavez are extraordinary – in grassroots democracy, health care, education and the sheer uplifting of people’s lives – but true equity and social justice and freedom from corruption remain distant goals. Venezuela’s well-off

complain endlessly that their economic power has been diminished; it hasn’t; economic growth has never been higher, business has never been better. What the rich no longer own is the government. And when the majority own the economy, true independence will be in sight. That’s true everywhere.

PN: U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, John Negroponte, recently called Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez “a threat to democracy” in Latin America. What are your views on this?

JP: This is Orwellian, like “war is peace.” Negroponte, whose record of overseeing Washington’s terrorism in Central America is infamous, is right about Hugo Chavez in one respect. Chavez is a “threat” – he’s the threat of an example to others that independence from Washington is actually possible.

PN: President Chavez talks about building “socialism of the 21st Century” in Venezuela. To what extent do you think this project is different to the socialist experiences in the twentieth century?

JP: In the time I spent with Chavez, what struck me was how unselfconsciously he demonstrated his own developing political awareness. I was intrigued to watch a man who is as much an educator as a leader. He will arrive at a school or a water project where local people are gathered and under his arm will be half a dozen books – Orwell, Chomsky, Dickens, Victor Hugo.

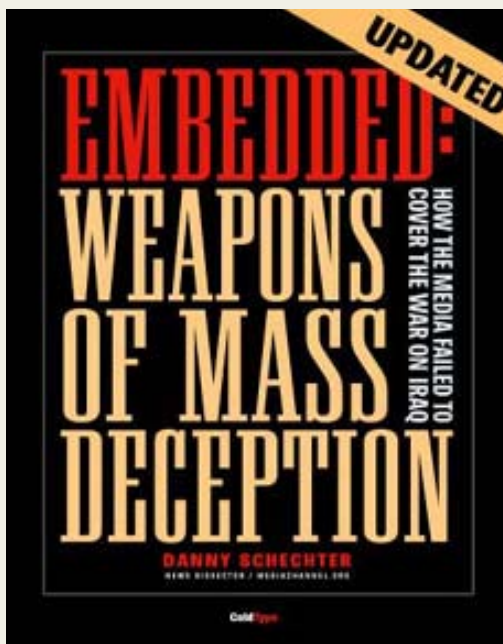
“Venezuela’s economy, for example, is still very much a ‘neo-liberal’ economy that continues to reward those with capital”

INTERVIEW

He'll proceed to quote from them and relate them to the condition of his audience. What he's clearly doing is building ordinary people's confidence in themselves. At the same, he's building his own political confidence and his understanding of the exercise of power. I doubt that he began as a socialist when he won power in 1998 – which makes his political journey all the more interesting. Clearly, he was always a reformer who paid respect to his impoverished roots. Certainly, the Venezuelan economy today is not socialist; perhaps it's on the way to becoming something like the social economy of Britain under the reforming Attlee Labour government. He is probably what Europeans used to be proud to call themselves: a social democrat. Look, this game of la-

bels is pretty pointless; he is an original and he inspires; so let's see where the Bolivarian project goes. True power for enduring change can only be sustained at the grassroots, and Chavez's strength is that he has inspired ordinary people to believe in alternatives to the old venal order. We have nothing like this spirit in Britain, where more and more people can't be bothered to vote any more. It's a lesson of hope, at the very least. **CT**

'The War on Democracy' is to be released in UK cinemas on Friday 15th June. For more info visit: www.johnpilger.com or www.warondemocracy.net This interview was first published by Venezuelanalysis.com



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CHILDREN OF THE DUST

BY JOHN PILGER

Israel is destroying any notion of a state of Palestine and is being allowed to imprison an entire nation. That is clear from the latest attacks on Gaza, whose suffering has become a metaphor for the tragedy imposed on the peoples of the Middle East and beyond. These attacks, reported on Britain's Channel 4 News, were "targeting key militants of Hamas" and the "Hamas infrastructure." The BBC described a "clash" between the same militants and Israeli F-16 aircraft.

Consider one such clash. The militants' car was blown to pieces by a missile from a fighter-bomber. Who were these militants? In my experience, all the people of Gaza are militant in their resistance to their jailer and tormentor. As for the "Hamas infrastructure," this was the headquarters of the party that won last year's democratic elections in Palestine. To report that would give the wrong impression. It would suggest that the people in the car and all the others over the years, the babies and the elderly who have also "clashed" with fighter-bombers, were victims of a

monstrous injustice. It would suggest the truth.

"Some say," said the Channel 4 reporter, that "Hamas has courted this [attack]..." Perhaps he was referring to the rockets fired at Israel from within the prison of Gaza which [at the time of writing] killed no one. Under international law an occupied people has the right to use arms against the occupier's forces.

This right is never reported. The Channel 4 reporter referred to an "endless war," suggesting equivalents. There is no war. There is resistance among the poorest, most vulnerable people on earth to an enduring, illegal occupation imposed by the world's fourth largest military power, whose weapons of mass destruction range from cluster bombs to thermonuclear devices, bankrolled by the superpower. In the past six years alone, wrote the historian Ilan Pappé, "Israeli forces have killed more than 4,000 Palestinians, half of them children."

Consider how this power works. According to documents obtained by

There is no war. There is resistance among the poorest, most vulnerable people on earth to an enduring, illegal occupation imposed by the world's fourth largest military power

GAZA'S AGONY

The Israelis' aim is to undermine the elected Palestinian government and ignite a civil war. They have not quite succeeded

United Press International, the Israelis once secretly funded Hamas as “a direct attempt to divide and dilute support for a strong, secular PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation] by using a competing religious alternative,” in the words of a former CIA official.

Today, Israel and the US have reversed this ploy and openly back Hamas's rival, Fatah, with bribes of millions of dollars. Israel recently secretly allowed 500 Fatah fighters to cross into Gaza from Egypt, where they had been trained by another American client, the Cairo dictatorship. The Israelis' aim is to undermine the elected Palestinian government and ignite a civil war. They have not quite succeeded. In response, the Palestinians forged a government of national unity, of both Hamas and Fatah. The latest attacks are aimed at destroying this.

With Gaza secured in chaos and the West Bank walled in, the Israeli plan, wrote the Palestinian academic Karma Nabulsi, is “a Hobbesian vision of an anarchic society: truncated, violent, powerless, destroyed, cowed, ruled by disparate militias, gangs, religious ideologues and extremists, broken up into ethnic and religious tribalism and co-opted collaborationists. Look to the Iraq of today . . .”

On 19 May, the Guardian received this letter from Omar Jabary al-Sarafah, a Ramallah resident: “Land, water and air are under constant sight of a sophisticated military surveillance system that makes Gaza like The Truman Show,” he wrote. “In this film every Gazan actor has a predefined role and the [Israeli] army behaves as a

director... The Gaza strip needs to be shown as what it is . . . an Israeli laboratory backed by the international community where human beings are used as rabbits to test the most dramatic and perverse practices of economic suffocation and starvation.”

The remarkable Israeli journalist Gideon Levy has described the starvation sweeping Gaza's more than a million and a quarter inhabitants and the “thousands of wounded, disabled and shell-shocked people unable to receive any treatment . . . The shadows of human beings roam the ruins . . . They only know the [Israeli army] will return and they know what this will mean for them: more imprisonment in their homes for weeks, more death and destruction in monstrous proportions.”

Consumed by melancholia

Whenever I have been in Gaza, I have been consumed by this melancholia, as if I were a trespasser in a secret place of mourning. Skeins of smoke from wood fires hang over the same Mediterranean Sea that free peoples know, but not here. Along beaches that tourists would regard as picturesque trudge the incarcerated of Gaza; lines of sepia figures become silhouettes, marching at the water's edge, through lapping sewage. The water and power are cut off, yet again, when the generators are bombed, yet again. Iconic murals on walls pockmarked by bullets commemorate the dead, such as the family of 18 men, women and children who “clashed” with a 500lb American/Israeli bomb, dropped on their block of flats as they slept. Presumably,

they were militants.

More than 40 per cent of the population of Gaza are children under the age of 15. Reporting on a four-year field study in occupied Palestine for the British Medical Journal, Dr Derek Summerfield wrote that “two-thirds of the 621 children killed at checkpoints, in the street, on the way to school, in their homes, died from small arms fire, directed in over half of cases to the head, neck and chest – the sniper’s wound.” A friend of mine with the United Nations calls them “children of the dust.” Their wonderful childishness, their rowdiness and giggles and charm, belie their nightmare.

I met Dr Khalid Dahlan, a psychiatrist who heads one of several children’s community health projects in Gaza. He told me about his latest survey. “The statistic I personally find unbearable,” he said, “is that 99.4 per cent of the children we studied suffer trauma. Once you look at the rates of exposure to trauma, you see why: 99.2 per cent of the study group’s homes were bombarded; 97.5 per cent were exposed to tear gas; 96.6 per cent witnessed shootings; 95.8 per cent witnessed bombardment and funerals; almost a quarter saw family members injured or killed.”

He said children as young as three faced the dichotomy caused by having to cope with these conditions. They dreamt about becoming doctors and nurses, then this was overtaken by an apocalyptic vision of themselves as the next generation of suicide bombers. They experienced this invariably after an attack by the Israelis. For some

boys, their heroes were no longer football players, but a confusion of Palestinian “martyrs” and even the enemy, “because Israeli soldiers are the strongest and have Apache gunships.”

Shortly before he died, Edward Said bitterly reproached foreign journalists for what he called their destructive role in “stripping the context of Palestinian violence, the response of a desperate and horribly oppressed people, and the terrible suffering from which it arises.” Just as the invasion of Iraq was a “war by media,” so the same can be said of the grotesquely one-sided “conflict” in Palestine.

Illegal occupation

As the pioneering work of the Glasgow University Media Group shows, television viewers are rarely told that the Palestinians are victims of an illegal military occupation; the term “occupied territories” is seldom explained. Only 9 per cent of young people interviewed in the UK know that the Israelis are the occupying force and the illegal settlers are Jewish; many believe them to be Palestinian. The selective use of language by broadcasters is crucial in maintaining this confusion and ignorance. Words such as “terrorism,” “murder” and “savagely, cold-blooded killing” describe the deaths of Israelis, almost never Palestinians.

There are honourable exceptions. The kidnapped BBC reporter Alan Johnston is one of them. Yet, amidst the avalanche of coverage of his abduction, no mention is made of the thousands of Palestinians abducted by Israel, many of whom will not see their fami-

For some boys, their heroes were no longer football players, but a confusion of Palestinian “martyrs” and even the enemy, “because Israeli soldiers are the strongest and have Apache gunships”

GAZA'S AGONY

A censorship by omission runs deep in western journalism on Israel, especially in the US. Hamas is dismissed as a "terrorist group sworn to Israel's destruction"

lies for years. There are no appeals for them. In Jerusalem, the Foreign Press Association documents the shooting and intimidation of its members by Israeli soldiers. In one eight-month period, as many journalists, including the CNN bureau chief in Jerusalem, were wounded by the Israelis, some of them seriously. In each case, the FPA complained. In each case, there was no satisfactory reply.

A censorship by omission runs deep in western journalism on Israel, especially in the US. Hamas is dismissed as a "terrorist group sworn to Israel's destruction" and one that "refuses to recognise Israel and wants to fight not talk."

This theme suppresses the truth: that Israel is bent on Palestine's destruction. Moreover, Hamas's long-standing proposals for a ten-year ceasefire are ignored, along with a recent, hopeful ideological shift within Hamas itself that amounts to a historic acceptance of the sovereignty of Israel. "The [Hamas] charter is not the Quran," said a senior Hamas official, Mohammed Ghazal. "Historically, we

believe all Palestine belongs to Palestinians, but we're talking now about reality, about political solutions . . . If Israel reached a stage where it was able to talk to Hamas, I don't think there would be a problem of negotiating with the Israelis [for a solution]."

When I last saw Gaza, driving towards the Israeli checkpoint and the razor wire, I was rewarded with a spectacle of Palestinian flags fluttering from inside the walled compounds. Children were responsible for this, I was told. They make flagpoles out of sticks tied together and one or two will climb on to a wall and hold the flag between them, silently. They do it when there are foreigners around and they believe they can tell the world. **CT**

John Pilger's latest book, Freedom Next Time, is published in paperback by Black Swan (£8.99). His first film for cinema, The War on Democracy, is released on 15 June – Watch the War on Democracy trailer: <http://warondemocracy.net> This article was first published in the New Statesman

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ONE APARTHEID REGIME DOWN, ONE MORE TO GO

BY RAMZY BAROUD

I stand at the southernmost corner of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope. The grand mountains underneath and behind infuse a moment of spiritual reflection unmatched in its depth and meaning. Before me is an awe-inspiring view: here the Atlantic's frigid waters gently meet the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. They meet but don't collide. The harmony is seamless; the greatness of this view is humbling.

I was invited to South Africa to deliver a keynote speech at the 'Al-Nakba' conference, held in Cape Town. The journey led me to other cities. Many speeches, presentations, media interviews later, I sat with a borrowed computer and scattered thoughts: how can one reflect without the least sense of certainty, assuredness? I ought to try.

"Where are the Black Africans?" was the first question to come to mind as a friend's car escorted me a distance from the Cape Town International Airport. I saw very few indications affirming that I was indeed in Africa as I gazed at the exaggeratedly beautiful surroundings

of the airport. My friend needed not respond however, as the car soon hurriedly zoomed by a "squatters' camp"; no slum can be compared to this, no refugee camp. Innumerable people are crammed in the tiniest and crudest looking 'houses' made of whatever those poor people could find laying around. It was not 'temporary accommodations', but permanent dwellings: here they live, marry, raise children and die.

It takes no brilliant mind to realize that Apartheid South Africa is still, in some ways, Apartheid South Africa. A lot has been done on the road to equal rights since the Africa National Congress (ANC), along with freedom fighters and civil society activists, combined forces to defeat a legacy of 350 years of oppression, colonialism and – in 1948 – an officially sanctioned system of Apartheid, a system instilled by the white minority government to ethnically cleanse, confine and subdue the overwhelmingly black majority.

True, the hundreds of Bantustans or 'homelands' in which the Blacks were

It takes no brilliant mind to realize that Apartheid South Africa is still, in some ways, Apartheid South Africa

AFRICAN EXAMPLE

it takes much more than 13 years, and uncountable promises to reconcile the calculated inequality of centuries

driven, only to be allowed to leave or enter White areas – as servants – with a special pass, are no longer an officially recognized apparatus. The ‘presidents’ of those Bantustans – puppet rulers handpicked by White authorities – are long discredited. Now, South Africans, of all colors, ethnicities and religions select their own leaders, in democratic elections that are, more or less, reflective of the overall desires of the populace. But it takes much more than 13 years, and uncountable promises to reconcile the calculated inequality of centuries.

Despite a hectic schedule of two weeks, I made it a goal to visit as many squatters’ camps as I could. I followed the path of ethnic cleansing that took place in District Six in Cape Town; it was a Trail of Tears of sorts, a Palestinian Catastrophe. My grandparents, mother and father were dragged from their homes under similar circumstances in 1948 in Palestine. They, too, were not suitable to live within the same ‘geographic radius’ as those who had deemed themselves superior. Those who were forcibly removed from District Six have finally won their land back. Palestinians are still refugees. My grandparents are long dead, so is my mother. My father, a very ill and old man, is waiting in our old home in the refugee camp in Gaza. He refuses to yield, to capitulate.

I spoke at a technical college that was erected for Whites only on the exact same spot where thousands of Colored and Blacks were uprooted and thrown somewhere else, somewhere more discreet, more acceptable to the

taste of Apartheid administrators. I paid a tribute to those resilient people who refused to embrace their inferior status, fought and died to regain their freedom and dignity. I saluted my people, who stood in solidarity with the fighters of South Africa.

In our Gaza camps, we mourned for South Africa and we celebrated when Nelson Mandela was set free. My father handed out candy to the neighborhood kids. When Bishop Desmond Tutu visited Palestine, Israeli settlers greeted him with racist graffiti and chants across the West Bank. For Palestinians, this was a personal insult. Tutu is ours, just as Che Guevara, Martin Luther, Malcolm X, Mahatma Gandhi, Ahmad Yassin and Yasser Arafat were and still are.

On Robben Island, where Mandela and hundreds of his comrades were held for many years, I touched the decaying walls of the prison. Food in the prison was rationed on the basis of skin color. Blacks always received the least. But prisoners defied the prison system nonetheless; they created a collective in which all the food received would be shared equally amongst them. I tore a piece of my Palestinian scarf and left it in Mandela’s cell; its chipped, albeit fortified walls, its thin floor mattress still stand witness to the injustice perpetrated by some and the undying faith in one’s principles embraced by others. I visited every cell in Section A and B, touched every wall, read every name of every inmate: Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Bantus were all kept here, fought, died and finally won their freedom together. They referred to each

other as comrades. Injustice is color-blind. So is true camaraderie.

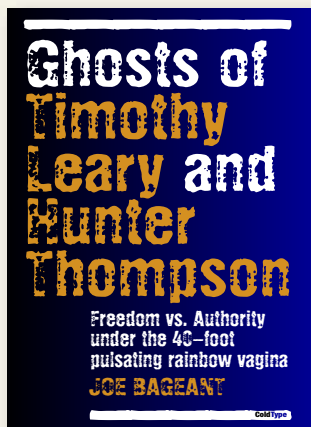
I have never felt the sense of solidarity and acceptance that I felt in South Africa. There is an unparalleled lesson to be learned in this amazing place. There is a lot to be sorted out: a true equality to be realized, but a lot has also been done. A veteran ANC fighter thanked me for the arms and money supplied to his unit, and many other units, by the PLO in the 1970's and 80's; he said he still has his PLO uniform, tucked in somewhere in his little decrepit 'house' in one of the squatters' camps dotting the city. It was a poignant reminder that the fight is not yet over.

Amongst the many names scribbled

at the fenced wall at the helm of Cape of Good Hope, someone took the time to write " Palestine." In the Apartheid Wall erected on Palestinian land in the West Bank, the South African parallel is expressed in more ways than one. The relationship cannot be any more obvious. The fight for justice is one, and shall always be. **CT**

In the Apartheid Wall erected on Palestinian land in the West Bank, the South African parallel is expressed in more ways than one

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TO THE SHORES OF TRIPOLI

BY URI AVNERY

The ordinary Israeli shrugs his shoulders when confronted with the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and dismisses it with five words: "They brought it on themselves"

The bloody battles that have erupted around the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp near Tripoli in Lebanon remind us that the refugee problem has not disappeared. On the contrary, 60 years after the "Nakba", the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948, it is again the center of attention throughout the world.

This is an open wound. Anyone who imagines that a solution to the Israel-Arab conflict is possible without healing this wound is deluding himself.

From Tripoli to Sderot, from Riyadh to Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugee problem continues to cast its shadow across the whole region. At the end of May, the media were again full of photos of Israeli and Palestinian refugees fleeing from their homes and of mothers mourning the death of their loved ones in Hebrew and Arabic – as if nothing had changed since 1948.

The ordinary Israeli shrugs his shoulders when confronted with the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and dismisses it with five words: "They brought it on themselves."

Learned professors and market vendors repeat that the Palestinians caused their own downfall when, in 1947, they rejected the Partition Plan of the United Nations and started a war to annihilate the Jewish community in the country.

That is a deeply rooted myth, one of the basic myths of Israeli consciousness. But it is far from reflecting what really happened.

First of all, because at that time there did not even exist a Palestinian national leadership which could take a decision.

In the Arab Revolt of 1935 to 1939 ("the troubles" in Israeli parlance), the Grand Mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, then the leader of the Palestinian Arabs, had most of the prominent Palestinians who did not accept his authority killed. He then fled the country and the remaining Palestinian leaders were exiled by the British to a remote island.

When the hour of destiny struck and the UN adopted the partition resolution, there was no Palestinian leader-

ship capable of deciding one way or the other. Instead, the leaders of the neighboring Arab states decided to send their armies into the country once the British Mandate had come to an end.

True, the masses of the Palestinian people opposed the partition plan. They believed that all of Palestine was their patrimony, and that the Jews, almost all of whom had recently arrived, did not have any right to it. The more so, since the UN plan gave the Jews, then only a third of the population, 55% of the country. Even in this territory, the Arabs constituted 40% of the inhabitants.

(In fairness it should be mentioned that the territory allotted to the Jews included the Negev – a huge desert that was desolate then and has mostly remained so to this day.)

The Jewish side did indeed accept the UN decision – but only in appearance. In secret meetings, David Ben-Gurion did not hide his intention to take the first opportunity to enlarge the territory allotted to the Jewish state and to assure an overwhelming Jewish majority in it. The war of 1948, which was started by the Arab side, created an opportunity to realize both aims: Israel grew from 55% to 78% of the country, and this territory was emptied of most of its Arab inhabitants. Many of them fled the terrors of war, many others were driven out by us. Almost none were allowed to return after the war.

In the course of the war, some 750,000 Palestinians became refugees. Natural increase doubles their number every 18 years, so they are now approaching five million.

That is an immense human tragedy, a humanitarian issue and a political problem. For long periods it seemed that the problem would disappear by itself with the passing of time, but it has repeatedly reared its head again.

Many parties have exploited the problem for their own ends. Various Arab regimes have at times tried to hitch their wagon to it.

The fate of the refugees varies from country to country. Jordan has accorded them citizenship, yet has kept many of them in miserable camps. The Lebanese have not given the refugees any civil rights at all, and have committed several massacres. Almost all Palestinian leaders demand the implementation of UN resolution 194 which was adopted 59 years ago and which promised the refugees a return to their homes as peaceful citizens.

Pretext for rejection

Few noticed that the Right of Return has served successive Israeli governments as a pretext to reject all peace initiatives. The return of five million refugees would mean the end of Israel as a state with a solid Jewish majority and turn it into a bi-national state – something that arouses the adamant opposition of a minimum of 99.99% of the Israeli-Jewish public.

This has to be realized if one is to understand the way Israelis view peace. An ordinary Israeli, even a decent person who sincerely desires peace, tells himself: the Arabs will never give up the Right of Return, therefore there is no chance for peace, and it isn't worthwhile even to start doing any-

In secret meetings, David Ben-Gurion did not hide his intention to take the first opportunity to enlarge the territory allotted to the Jewish state and to assure an overwhelming Jewish majority in it

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If the Israeli public understood that the entire Arab world was offering a comprehensive peace agreement without the actual realization of the Right of Return, they might accept it gladly

thing about it.

Thus, paradoxically, the refugee problem has turned into an instrument for those Israelis who oppose any peace based on compromise. They rely on the fact that almost no Arab leader would dare to give up the Right of Return openly. In private conversations, many Arab leaders recognize that the return is impossible, but they dare not say so openly. To do so would mean political suicide – just as announcing a readiness to take back refugees would be suicidal for an Israeli politician.

In spite of this, a subterranean shift has taken place in recent years on the Arab side. There have been hints that Israel's demographic problem cannot be ignored. Here and there, creative solutions have been proposed. (Once, in a public meeting of Gush Shalom, a Palestinian representative said: "Today, the Arab minority constitutes 20% of Israel's citizens.

So let us agree that for every 80 new Jewish immigrants coming to the country, 20 Palestinian refugees will be allowed to return. In such a way, the present proportion would be maintained." The public reacted enthusiastically.)

Now, a revolutionary development has taken place. The Arab League has offered Israel a peace plan: all 22 Arab states would recognize Israel and establish diplomatic and economic relations with it, in return for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The offer did not ignore the refugee

problem. It mentioned UN resolution 194, but added a qualification of fundamental importance: that the solution would be reached "by agreement" between the two parties. In other words: Israel would have the right of veto over refugees returning to Israeli territory.

This put the Israeli government in a difficult position. If the Israeli public understood that the entire Arab world was offering a comprehensive peace agreement without the actual realization of the Right of Return, they might accept it gladly. Therefore, everything was done to obscure the decisive word. The guided (and misguided) Israeli media emphasized the plan's mention of Resolution 194 and played down the talk of an "agreed upon" solution.

Ready to talk?

The government treated the Arab offer with manifest disdain, but nevertheless tried to derive advantage from it. Ehud Olmert announced his readiness to talk with an Arab delegation – provided that it did not consist of Egypt and Jordan alone.

This way, Olmert and Tzipi Livni hope to attain an important political achievement without paying for it: to compel Saudi Arabia and other states to enter into relations with Israel. Since there are "no free lunches," the Arabs refused. Nothing came out of the whole affair.

If someone had offered Israel this Arab League peace plan on June 4, 1967, a day before the Six-Day War, we would have thought that the Messiah had arrived. Now, our government con-

siders this offer nothing but a clever trick: the Arabs are indeed ready to relinquish the return of the refugees, but want to compel us to give up the occupied territories and to dismantle the settlements.

In a historical perspective, the Arab League is correcting an error it made 40 years ago, which had far-reaching consequences. Soon after the Six-Day War, on September 1, 1967, the heads of the Arab states assembled in Khartoum and decided upon the “Three No’s” – No peace with Israel, No recognition of Israel, No negotiations with Israel.

One can understand why such a misguided resolution was adopted. The Arab countries had just suffered a humiliating military defeat. They wanted to prove to their peoples and the world that they had not gone down on their knees. They wanted to keep their national dignity. But for the government of Israel, it was a present from heaven.

The resolution freed it from any need to conduct negotiations which might have compelled it to return the territories it had just conquered. It gave the green light for the founding of settlements, an enterprise that continues unhindered to this very day, removing the land from under the feet of the Palestinians. And, of course, it swept the refugee problem from the table.

Realistic resolution

The new Arab League proposal could repair the damage done to the Palestinian cause at Khartoum. The entire Arab world has now adopted a realistic resolution. From now on, the task is to get the Israeli public to grasp the full

meaning of this proposal, and especially its significance concerning the return of the refugees. This task rests on the shoulders of the Israeli peace forces, but also of the Arab leadership.

To achieve this goal, the refugee problem must be transferred to the realm of reality. It must undergo a process of de-mystification.

At present, an Israeli sees only a nightmare: five million refugees are waiting to flood Israel. They will demand the return of their lands, on which Israeli towns and villages are now located, and their homes, which have been demolished long ago or in which Israelis are now living. Israel, as a state with a Hebrew majority, will disappear.

This fear must be neutralized, and this wound must be healed. On the psychological level, we must recognize our responsibility for that part of the problem which was actually caused by us. A “Committee for Truth and Reconciliation” could, perhaps, determine the dimensions of this part. For this we must sincerely apologize, as other nations have apologized for injustices committed by them.

On the practical level, the real problem of five million human beings must be solved. All of them will have a right to generous compensation, which will enable them to start a new life any way they wish. Those who want to stay where they are, with the consent of the local government, will have the ability to rebuild the life of their families. Those who want to live in the future State of Palestine, perhaps in the areas cleared of settlements, must receive the

The resolution freed it from any need to conduct negotiations which might have compelled it to return the territories it had just conquered

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necessary international assistance. I, personally, believe that it would be good for us to receive back a certain agreed-upon number of refugees in Israel proper, as a symbolic contribution to the end to the tragedy.

That is neither a dream nor a nightmare. We have already mastered more difficult tasks. It would be much easier and cheaper than to continue a war

that has no military solution and no end. Sixty years ago, a deep wound was opened. Since then it has not healed. It infects our life and endangers our future. It is high time to heal it. That is the lesson of Tripoli in the north and Sderot in the South. **CT**

Uri Avneri is an Irgun veteran turned Israeli peace activist



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IF WE REALLY CARE ABOUT IRAQI ...

BY WILLIAM BLUM

If the US leaves Iraq, things will really get bad? This appears to be the last remaining, barely-breathing argument of that vanishing species who still support the god-awful war. The argument implies a deeply-felt concern about the welfare and safety of the Iraqi people. What else could it mean? That the US military can't leave because it's needed to protect the oil bonanza awaiting American oil companies as soon as the Iraqi parliament approves the new written-in-Washington oil law? No, the Bush administration loves the people of Iraq. How much more destruction, killing and torturing do you need to be convinced of that? We can't leave because of the violence. We can't leave until we have assured that peace returns to our dear comrades in Iraq.

To better understand this argument, it helps to keep in mind the following about the daily horror that is life in Iraq:

It did not exist before the US occupation.

The insurgency violence began as,

and remains, a reaction to the occupation; like almost all insurgencies in occupied countries – from the American Revolution to the Vietcong – it's a fight directed toward getting foreign forces to leave.

The next phase was the violence of Iraqis against other Iraqis who worked for or sought employment with anything associated with the occupation regime.

Then came retaliatory attacks for these attacks. Followed by retaliatory attacks for the retaliatory attacks.

Jihadists from many countries have flocked to Iraq because they see the war against the American Satan occupiers as a holy war.

Before the occupation, many Sunnis and Shiites married each other; since the occupation they have been caught up in a spiral of hating and killing each other. And for these acts there has, of course, to be retaliation.

The occupation's abolishment of most jobs in the military and in Saddam Hussein's government, and the chaos that is Iraqi society under the oc-

The Bush administration loves the people of Iraq. How much more destruction, killing and torturing do you need to be convinced of that?

The US military itself has been a main perpetrator of violence, killing individually and en masse, killing any number, any day, for any reason, anyone, any place, often in mindless retaliation against anyone nearby for an insurgent attack

cupation, have left many destitute; kidnappings for ransom and other acts of criminal violence have become popular ways to make a living, or at least survive. US-trained, financed, and armed Iraqi forces have killed large numbers of people designated as “terrorists” by someone official, or perhaps someone unofficial, or by someone unknown, or by chance.

The US military itself has been a main perpetrator of violence, killing individually and en masse, killing any number, any day, for any reason, anyone, any place, often in mindless retaliation against anyone nearby for an insurgent attack. The US military and its coalition allies have also been the main target of violent attacks. A Department of Defense report of November 2006 stated: “Coalition forces remained the target of the majority of attacks (68%).”^[1]

And here is James Baker, establishment eminence, co-chair of the Iraq Study Group, on CNN with Anderson Cooper:

Cooper: And is it possible that getting the U.S. troops out will actually lessen that violence, that it will at least take away the motivation of nationalist insurgents?

Baker: Many people have argued that to us. Many people in Iraq made that case.

Cooper: Do you buy it?

Baker: Yes, I think there is some validity to it, absolutely. Then we are no longer seen to be the occupiers.^[2]

In spite of all of the above we are told that the presence of the United

States military has been and will continue to be a buffer against violence. Iraqis themselves do not believe this. A poll published in September found that Iraqis believe, by a margin of 78 to 21 percent, that the US military presence is “provoking more conflict that it is preventing.”^[3]

Remember that we were warned a thousand times of a communist bloodbath in Vietnam if American forces left. The American forces left. There was never any kind of bloodbath.

If the United States leaves – meaning all its troops and bases – it will remove the very foundation, origin, and inspiration of most of the hate and violence. Iraqis will have a chance to reclaim their land and their life. They have a right to be given that opportunity. Let America’s deadly “love” embrace of the Iraqi people come to an end. Let the healing begin.

Some people love guns. But why should the rest of us be targets?

The massacre at Virginia Tech is the kind of tragedy that invariably produces an abundance of sociological and psychological speculation, comparisons to the violence of American foreign policy, and many other clichés, platitudes, and truisms; a lot of ground I prefer not to walk over again. Except this one thing, as knee-reflex as it is: We should ban all guns. It should be illegal to possess any functioning firearm; those who already possess them should be obliged to turn them in for a payment. No halfway measures here. We went beyond halfway measures many massacres ago.

Last year in England and Wales (population 54 million), where there are tough restrictions on gun ownership, there were 50 shooting deaths. In Washington, DC (population half a million), there were 137 fatal shootings.^[4]

Nearly twice as many people commit suicide in the 15 US states with the highest rates of gun ownership than in the six states with the lowest rates of gun ownership, although the population of the two groups is about the same. Guns are used in only five percent of suicide attempts, but more than 90 percent of those attempts are fatal, whereas drugs account for nearly 75 percent of suicide attempts, but the fatality rate in those attempts is less than 3 percent.^[5]

Those who question the correlation between ease of gun ownership and death by gunfire should try to imagine what the Virginia Tech killer would have done if he hadn't been able to purchase guns as easily as he had. What would he have used? A club? A knife? He would have been jumped and disarmed after attacking his first victim in the classroom.

The only exception to the gun ban should be for law enforcement. That doesn't include the military. If the American military did not have any weapons this sad old world would be a much safer and nicer place, for American soldiers as well as their victims. So let's perform an act of euthanasia and pull the plug on the military's life-support machine. Let's convert the Pentagon into affordable housing. We won't have to worry about anti-American terrorists because our un-armed forces

would not be going all over the world and creating them by the thousands with bombings, invasions, overthrows of governments, occupations, support of repressive regimes, and similar charming activities, all of which require vast amounts of firearms and bombs. Yes, the bombs would become history as well.

Oh, one more thing. Before the gun ban goes into effect, a posse should be formed to go and shoot up the National Rifle Association's headquarters. The NRA loves to cite the Second Amendment to the Constitution: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." What militias, in the 21st century, are the NRA gun-lovers thinking of? And what state? I'd guess that most NRA members are fervent libertarians who hold a lot of paranoia and no love for any state. It's time for another constitutional amendment to abolish the Second Amendment, like the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments changed the Constitution to abolish slavery.^[6]

Because of Virginia Tech's location and the fact that several of the victims came from the Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC, where I live, the Washington Post gave book-length coverage to the event. I found myself choking up, at times with tears, repeatedly, each day as I read the stories of the stolen young lives. Two days after the massacre, the Supreme Court issued a ruling making certain abortions illegal. This led to statements from celebrating anti-abortion activists about

Those who question the correlation between ease of gun ownership and death by gunfire should try to imagine what the Virginia Tech killer would have done if he hadn't been able to purchase guns as easily as he had. What would he have used? A club?

Unfortunately, with many of these activists, their perfect love for human beings doesn't extend to the human beings of Iraq or Afghanistan

how the life of “unborn children” would be saved, and how the fetus is fully a human being deserving of as much care and respect and legal protection as any other human being. But does anyone know cases of parents grieving over an aborted fetus the way the media has shown parents and friends grieving over the slain Virginia Tech students? Of course not. If for no other reason than the parents choose to have an abortion. Does anyone know of a case of the parents of an aborted fetus tearfully remembering the fetus's first words, or high school graduation or wedding or the camping trip they all took together? Or the fetus's smile or the way it laughed? Of course not. Because — to those who support abortion on demand — the fetus is not a human being in a sufficiently meaningful physical, social, intellectual, and emotional sense. But the anti-abortion activists — often for reasons of sexual prudery, anti-feminism, religion (the Supreme Court ruling derived from the five Catholic members of the court), or other personal or political hangups — throw a halo around the fetus, treat the needs and desires of the parents as nothingness, and damn all those who differ with them as child murderers. Unfortunately, with many of these activists, their perfect love for human beings doesn't extend to the human beings of Iraq or Afghanistan.

A conservative's idea of a random act of kindness is cutting the capital gains tax

Michael Scheuer is a former CIA officer who headed the Agency's Osama bin

Laden unit. He's also the author of *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam and the Future of America*, and *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror*. In last month's edition of this report, in my section on Washington's war on terrorism, quoting from the Sydney Morning Herald I wrote that when Scheuer was told that the largest group in Guantánamo came from custody in Pakistan, he said: “We absolutely got the wrong people.” This sentiment is in keeping with the point I was making, that a significant portion of “terrorists” held in US custody are no such thing.

But then the editor of DissidentVoice.org, which reprints my report each month, received a letter from Mr. Scheuer, saying in part: “Regarding the quote attributed to me in Mr. Blum's column. I do not recall ever making such a statement, and if I did make it, I spoke mistakenly. I have no reason to believe that any one in the Guantanamo Bay facility does not deserve to be there. I have objected to the facility only because it forces the United States to be subject to the pacifist whinings of human rights advocates and EC [presumably European Community] officials.”

I replied to Scheuer, asking him if his remark — “I have no reason to believe that any one in the Guantanamo Bay facility does not deserve to be there” — referred only to “the present prisoners, those held as of the time of your alleged remark in February 2006, or any and all of the prisoners who've been held there the past 5 years? If the last, that would be quite a remarkable

statement to make given all that we know about the very faulty criteria employed in deciding who to send to Guantanamo, a portion of which I discuss in my article. Even if you're referring to the first or second time period, your statement would still be most surprising. How could you possibly know that? Or even hazard a guess? As I mention, even the prison commanders didn't believe that."

Scheuer has not yet replied. I had also wondered about his use of the term "pacifist whinings." Then, in a review of former CIA Director George Tenet's new book, Scheuer takes his former boss to task as well as Bill Clinton for not attacking Afghanistan enough in the late 1990s to kill Osama bin Laden and his followers, accusing the former president of "cowardly pacifism." Scheuer writes: "I did not – and do not – care about collateral casualties in such situations, as most of the nearby civilians would be the families that bin Laden's men had brought to a war zone.

"But Tenet did care. 'You can't kill everyone,' he would say. That's an admirable humanitarian concern in the abstract, but it does nothing to protect the United States. Indeed, thousands of American families would not be mourning today had there been more ferocity and less sentimentality among the Clinton team."^[7]

It should be noted that in 1993 Clinton ordered the firing of missiles into Iraq, killing and injuring many, as retaliation for Iraqi involvement in a plot to assassinate former president George H.W. Bush who was due to visit

Kuwait. Both the plot and the Iraqi involvement should be filed away under "alleged." They remain in the same file today. In 1998 the president ordered the firing of several missiles into Afghanistan and Sudan in an attempt to take out suspected terrorists and their facilities, instead hitting "collateral casualties." And the following year, Clinton, wearing a NATO mask, dropped bombs on the people of Yugoslavia for 78 consecutive days.

But by Michael Scheuer's standards, Bill Clinton was a pacifist.

If it's difficult for you pacifists – of the whining, cowardly, or any other variety – to appreciate or understand the mind or heart or soul of a Michael Scheuer, if you think he's out of touch with reality, amoral, and scary, take a look at a recent get-together between George W. and a group of neo-conservatives. Compared to these guys, Scheuer should quickly seek out the nearest Friends Meeting House. And the rest of us should seek out another country. Or planet.

Salon.org reported on the February 28 luncheon between Bush and the leading lights of American neo-conservatism. You have to read the whole thing, but here's a snippet: "The most critical priority [of the neo-cons] is to convince the President to continue to ignore the will of the American people and to maintain full-fledged loyalty to the neoconservative agenda, no matter how unpopular it becomes. To do this, they have convinced the President that he has tapped into a much higher authority than the American people – namely, God-mandated, objective

"I did not – and do not – care about collateral casualties in such situations, as most of the nearby civilians would be the families that bin Laden's men had brought to a war zone"

To attack the United States, Hussein would have had to be imbued with nothing less than an irresistible desire for mass national suicide. I do not know of any evidence that he was insane

morality — and as long as he adheres to that (which is achieved by continuing his militaristic policies in the Middle East, whereby he is fighting Evil and defending Good), God and history will vindicate him. . . Finally, the neoconservatives left Bush with the overarching instruction — namely, the only thing that he should concern himself with, the only thing that really matters, is Iran.”^[8]

Has there ever been an empire that didn't tell itself and the world that it was unlike all other empires, that its mission was not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate? And that it had God on its side? Will America's immune system be able to rid itself of its raw-meat conservatives?

The biggest lie of all is never mentioned

Bill Moyers' recent documentary “Buying the War” does an excellent job of showing how the preeminent members of American mainstream journalism failed woefully in their duty to the public and their profession by not properly questioning the great falsehoods of the Bush administration in the leadup to the invasion of Iraq. The media did not expose the fallacies of White House claims that Saddam Hussein possessed all manner of weapons of mass destruction, that he had close working ties to Osama bin Laden and/or al Qaeda, that an Iraqi agent had met with Mohammad Atta, the reputed leader of the 9-11 hijackers, and other stories put forth by the Bush-Cheney gang to create the belief that Saddam Hussein was a threat to the United States.

But the biggest lie of all about the war in Iraq, one that I've discussed before in this report, one that the mainstream media never pursue, one that Moyers doesn't mention in his documentary, but one that has been clearly implied during five years of news and discussions, is this: If in fact Saddam Hussein had possessed all those terrible weapons he would have been a threat to use them against the United States, even without provocation. This is so preposterous that I doubt that even Bush or Cheney held such a belief. To attack the United States, Hussein would have had to be imbued with nothing less than an irresistible desire for mass national suicide. I do not know of any evidence that he was insane.

Nor the leaders of Iran. But that counts for nought when the empire knows that you are a non-believer in the empire.

Moreover, having exposed the administration's stated excuses for war as fraudulent, the documentary inexplicably presents no discussion whatsoever as to what might have been the real reasons for the war, though the program undoubtedly left many viewers wondering just that — “So why did they lie so much? To cover up what?” Most TV journalists tend to tread rather lightly in a field full of mines labeled “oil” or “Israel” or “defense corporations.”^[9]

Democracy Now!

I'm a fan of Amy Goodman and her morning radio program “Democracy Now.” It consistently covers a wide

range of issues of interest to the progressive community and undoubtedly recruits many new members to the cause. But perhaps their range is too wide to expect the Democracy Now! staff to have done all of their homework on all of the issues. Cuba is one such issue where the program tends to stumble. The latest example was on April 26. In the opening news report, Amy informed us: "In Cuba, six dissidents have been released from prison nearly two years after they were jailed. The Cuban government had drawn international condemnation after the jailings in the summer of 2005."

That was it. CBS or NPR couldn't have followed the State Department script any better. There must be many thousands in American prisons who could be called "dissidents" for having at one time or another expressed serious disgust with what the US was doing in some part of the world and who had taken part in a protest; or done the same in regard to some vital economic, civil rights, or civil liberties issue at home. "Oh," you declare, "but they were not imprisoned because of their dissidence." Yes, that's true about almost all of them. But it's also true about almost all Cuban prisoners.

To grasp this, one must first understand the following: The United States is to the Cuban government like al Qaeda is to Washington, only much more powerful and much closer. Since the Cuban revolution, the United States and anti-Castro Cuban exiles in the US have inflicted upon Cuba greater damage and greater loss of life than what happened in New York and

Washington on September 11, 2001. Cuban dissidents typically have had very close, indeed intimate, political and financial connections to American government officials, particularly in Havana through the American Embassy (the United States Interests Section). Would the US government ignore a group of Americans receiving funds from al Qaeda and/or engaging in repeated meetings with known leaders of that organization inside the United States? In the past few years, the American government has arrested a great many people in the US and abroad solely on the basis of alleged ties to al Qaeda, with a lot less evidence to go by than Cuba has had with its dissidents' ties to the United States, evidence gathered by many Cuban double agents. **CT**

NOTES

- [1] http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2006/iraq-security-stability_nov2006.htm
- [2] CNN, December 6, 2006
- [3] World Public Opinion Poll, conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, "The Iraqi Public on the US Presence and the Future of Iraq", September 27, 2006, p.5
- [4] Washington Post, April 24, 2007, p.18
- [5] Study by Harvard School of Public Health, Associated Press, April 16, 2007
- [6] The title of this section and some thoughts on the Constitution are taken from an excellent article on the subject of gun control by Jonathan Safran Foer in the Washington Post, April 22, 2007, p. B5
- [7] Washington Post, April 29, 2007, p.B1
- [8] Glenn Greenwald: http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2007/03/14/roberts_luncheon/print.html,
- [9] Transcript: <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/btw/transcript1.html>

Would the US government ignore a group of Americans receiving funds from al Qaeda and/or engaging in repeated meetings with known leaders of that organization inside the United States?

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CONDOLEEZZA RICE: COOKED IN OIL

BY BARRY LANDO

During much of the period that Chevron was violating the sanctions, Condoleezza Rice was on the Chevron Board of Directors. She went on the board in 1991. Iraq began demanding the illegal surcharges in August 2000

Now that Paul Wolfowitz has been more or less sidelined, how about some questions for Condoleezza Rice?

What's to ask Condi? Well, for starters about her role in the Oil-for-Food scandal – a role she might have played first in private industry, and then, as President Bush's National Security Advisor.

A recent investigation by the International Herald Tribune and the Italian business daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* revealed that Total, France's largest company, indirectly paid up to \$1 million dollars in illegal surcharges to Saddam's regime on oil it bought from Iraq from 2000 to 2002.

That sum, however, is nothing compared to the \$20 million that – according to another report – U.S. oil giant Chevron apparently paid indirectly to Saddam during the same period. Chevron will now pay between \$25 to \$50 million dollars in fines as part of a settlement with the U.S. Justice Department.

What has Condoleezza Rice to do with all that?

As she tells it, she was just a very concerned spectator. In January 2005, during Senate confirmation hearings to be the nation's next Secretary of State, Ms. Rice expressed her outrage at revelations that Saddam had used some of the billions he skimmed from the Oil-for-Food program to purchase dual use equipment that could have been used to produce WMD.

"I think it is a scandal what happened with Oil-for-Food," she told the senators. "We've got to get to the bottom of what happened here...and those who were responsible, I think, should be held accountable."

Right, except that during much of the period that Chevron was violating the sanctions, Condoleezza Rice was on the Chevron board of directors. She went on the board in 1991. Iraq began demanding the illegal surcharges in August 2000. By the time that Rice resigned from the board in January 15, 2001 to work in the White House, Chevron had already bought millions of barrels of crude from Iraq, even though Iraq's supplemental charges violated the Oil-for-Food program.

According to the Volcker Committee which investigated the Oil-for-Food program, the fact that Saddam was charging illegal supplements was common knowledge in the oil industry.

Though it may be argued that boards of directors are often big name figureheads, according to Chevron's own executives the company's policy was that "board members must hear the bad news along with the good. And they should hear it in board meetings, before it appears in the newspapers."

As Claudio Gatti, who wrote the IHT reports, pointed out, if any board members should have heard the bad news about illegal payments to Saddam, it would have been the board's Public Policy Committee, established specifically to consider important legal, environmental and other policy issues. For two years, it was chaired by Condoleezza Rice. (Perhaps some enterprising reporter or congressional investigator will talk with other members of that committee to see if the subject ever came up.)

But Rice's possible complicity in the Oil-for-Food scandal doesn't stop there. At the beginning of 2001, she became President Bush's National Security Advisor. One of her major preoccupations, of course, was Saddam Hussein. As she told the Senate committee in 2005, the United States relied on Oil-for-Food "to keep Saddam Hussein contained and checked. And clearly we weren't doing that. The sanctions were breaking down. He was playing the international community like a violin."

Who arguably better knew the music and some of the key players then

Condoleezza Rice, fresh from the Chevron board?

One wonders what thoughts crossed her mind when she read – as she must have – reports by U.S. intelligence agencies detailing how sanctions against Iraq were being thwarted by the major oil companies..

Indeed, according to the Volcker Committee, Saddam's manipulations had been reported to members of the 661 Committee which oversaw the U.N. Sanctions. The most powerful member of that Committee, of course, was the United States.

When did she know?

What did Condoleezza know about all this and when did she know it? It's doubtful we'll ever find out from Condi directly. She has an impressive record of either somehow ignoring, forgetting or gliding by when confronted with unpleasant issues.

For instance when she was questioned by a congressional committee this past February about why the Bush administration in 2003 rejected an offer by Iran to negotiate major issues with the U.S – including Iran's nuclear program – Rice testified that she had never seen any such proposal.

She was immediately contradicted by Flynt Leverett, who worked on the National Security Council when it was headed by Rice. He compared the potential offered by Iran's proposal to the 1972 U.S. opening to China. He said he was confident it was seen by Rice and then-Secretary of State Colin Powell but "the administration rejected the overture."

Condi has an impressive record of either somehow ignoring, forgetting or gliding by when confronted with unpleasant issues

"The message to most Iraqis is that the Coalition can't provide them the most basic government service: security... We've become the worst of all things – an ineffective occupier"

Other congressional investigators are still trying to find out how the charge that Saddam had been attempting to purchase uranium in Niger got into President Bush's State of the Union Speech in January 2003. This despite a specific warning from the CIA to the White House in October 2002 that the charge could not be substantiated. In fact, Condoleezza Rice had deleted that accusation from an earlier Bush speech for that very reason.

Condoleezza now claims that the CIA warning had somehow slipped by, forgotten by both herself and her deputy, Stephen Hadley.

"Maybe we should have remembered. We didn't." She recently said.

Ms. Rice is refusing a subpoena to testify about the affair before a committee of the U.S. Congress.

Terrorist warning

On another occasion, after Bob Woodward's latest book, *State of Denial* charged that CIA Director George Tenet had come to the White House on July 10, 2001 specifically to warn Rice of a serious terrorist attack being prepared and aimed at the United States, Rice told reporters that it was "incomprehensible" that she could have ignored dire terrorist threats two months before 9/11. She also claimed not to remember any such meeting with Tenet in the White House on that date.

It later turned out there was such a meeting, but Rice still denied receiving any urgent warnings about Al Qaeda.

In his book, Woodward also quotes David Kay, who led the hunt for WMD after the invasion, and found out – to

his own surprise – that there were none. Kay later told an NSC staffer who claimed that Rice "was the best national security adviser in the history of the United States."

"Well, she could have stopped trying to be the best friend of the president and be the best adviser and realize she's got this screening function," Kay said.

When Tenet had insisted the WMD case was a "slam dunk," she should have followed up aggressively, demanding a full reexamination of every last shred of the "slam dunk" evidence... She was probably the worst national security adviser in modern times since the office was created,' he said."

There is a similar damning account in Paul Bremmer's description of his tour as U.S. proconsul in Baghdad, *My Year in Iraq*.

As Bremmer tells it he realized early on that the insurgency was going to represent a serious, perhaps fatal, threat to U.S. plans for Iraq. He repeatedly expressed those fears to Washington, along with increasingly urgent requests for more U.S. troops on the ground.

Among those he repeatedly warned, he says, were Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice. Rumsfeld didn't even reply to one particularly stark warning. Nor, says Bremmer, did he hear any further about it from Rice.

A few days later, says Bremer, he briefed Condoleezza again, and Steve Hadley, on the catastrophic security situation: "the message to most Iraqis is that the Coalition can't provide them the most basic government service: se-

curity... We've become the worst of all things – an ineffective occupier.”

What was the reaction of Rice and Hadley according to Bremer? They “listened but made few comments.” Bremer and his assistant walked away “not sure if our analysis would have any effect in Washington.”

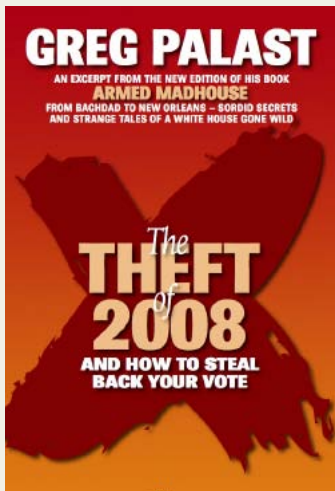
I heard a similar account in the Spring of 2004 from a top Amnesty International official in Washington. Already in June of 2003, Amnesty and other human rights organizations were attempting to alert the Bush administration to the many documented cases

of torture and killing taking place in U.S. military prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan. This was almost half a year before the Abu Graib scandal became public.

Among the top officials they personally alerted: Colin Powell – and Condoleezza Rice. **CT**

Barry Lando, a former 60 Minutes producer, is the author of Web of Deceit: The History of Western Complicity in Iraq from Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush. He also blogs at Barrylando.com

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TWO IDEOLOGIES AND A FUNERAL

BY DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

It is important to defeat each of regressive conservatism's individual failed policies head-on, before they cause further damage, but it is more important to destroy the whole monster once and for all

Social scientists aren't generally blessed with the ability that those in the physical sciences have to manufacture artificial conditions allowing hypothesis testing.

In a worst case scenario, a physicist could be required to scrounge up tens of millions of dollars to build a particle accelerator, or a Hubble telescope. A social scientist, on the other hand, might need to launch a war to measure its properties, or starve people to study the psychology of famine. Oops – er, no can do. Try getting a grant for that!

Sometimes, though, you just get lucky. And when it comes to judging the central political debate of our time, we are lucky (as social scientists, that is, which means that we've been very unlucky, of late, as citizens).

America has conducted a natural experiment in ideology over the previous century, and we are now in a position to evaluate its results. From the 1930s through the 1970s, this country adopted essentially liberal policies (American liberal, to be sure, but still liberal). From the 1980s to the present, America

charted a largely conservative course. There were huge exceptions to both tendencies, of course, but the overall trajectory of national politics during these eras cannot seriously be denied.

Now we are in a position to ask the simple empirical question: Which was better?

The answer, equally simple, strikes me as manifestly clear. Unfortunately, though, because liberals lost their conviction and their courage during the conservative era and therefore remain still to this day unwilling to even speak in ideological terms, let alone to name and indict conservatism's failings in just those terms, few Americans are aware of this experiment and its results.

That can and must change. It is important to defeat each of regressive conservatism's individual failed policies head-on, before they cause further damage, but it is more important to destroy the whole monster once and for all, bringing the shame and approbation down on its head that it so richly deserves, such that it might never return to haunt us again.

Assuming that people can be persuaded by facts and reason (a very large and unwarranted assumption in many cases, as I believe Al Gore's new book is about to argue, and as I have found all too often from personal experience), this should be as easy as catching Dick Cheney in a lie – in other words, a total cakewalk. The case is overwhelming.

Consider, to begin with, economic conditions. The achievement of liberalism during its ascendant period was no less than the vast expansion – one might even say the very creation – of the American middle class.

Americans owned homes in quantities that would have been inconceivable prior to this time. They sent their children (and themselves) to college in numbers vastly greater than ever before. They had better access to health-care, and so they lived better, and they lived longer. And they also lived more humane lives than they had in the past, without having to work every hour of every week, with time for families, with access to cultural resources that enriched their lives, and with even a few bucks left remaining to throw the kids in the station wagon and take a vacation here and there.

It would, of course, be wrong to suggest that this was all the product of liberal policies, as opposed to other factors which were occurring simultaneously. But it would be equally erroneous to suggest that such policies were irrelevant. They were not. Social Security allowed seniors to retire in dignity where many had not previously been able to. The GI Bill sent hundreds

of thousands of Americans to college, the first generation in their families ever to do so. Medicare and Medicaid brought crucial healthcare services to seniors and the less fortunate. Minimum wage and overtime laws protected workers from exploitation. Labor organizing laws allowed for decent wages and benefits. Environmental legislation protected the air we breathe and the water we drink from unhealthy if not lethal levels of pollution.

'Socialistic' assault

We could go on and on from there, but the point is made. The positive impact programs like these, and many others, have made in the lives of hundreds of millions of Americans is incalculable. Of course, conservatives bitterly opposed almost all of them, all down the line. And, in many cases, they even continue to do so today. Some among the regressive right, for instance, have still not gotten over the 'socialistic' assault of Social Security, and can't wait to dismantle this and every other similar program, so that more people suffer while Wall Street grows yet fatter.

If anybody needs a taste of what that world might look like, just consider the last quarter century. In the era of Reagan, Gingrich, the Bushes and, yes, Clinton, we've had our very own experiment in conservative economics. Are you liking it so far?

Your answer probably depends on the size of your wallet. Remarkably, GDP growth during this period has been rather robust, while the middle class has more or less stood still. The

Some among the regressive right, for instance, have still not gotten over the 'socialistic' assault of Social Security, and can't wait to dismantle this and every other similar program, so that more people suffer while Wall Street grows yet fatter

CONSERVATISM'S END

In 1982, CEOs made 42 times more in salary than their average worker. In 2001, that had become 525 times the (very) mean worker salary. So that a CEO now makes in a long afternoon what his employees make in an entire year

hourly wage of the median worker rose only nine percent from 1979 to 2005. Median family income growth rose just 6 percent from 1979 to 1995 and the median family's income actually fell by 2.9 percent from 2000 to 2004. Most of the middle class feels like it is just getting by, and increasingly – as employers jettison healthcare and pension benefits, and as even white collar jobs are now being exported overseas – like they are slipping. Not surprisingly, Americans are today also drowning under staggering amounts of personal debt, estimated in 2004 at an average of \$19,000 per US household, not including home mortgage debt.

How can we explain that GDP has been rising at a solid clip, but the middle class is stagnant? Where is all that money going? Well, for the richest Americans, these have been the best of times. Before the liberal period of the last century, the wealthiest ten percent of Americans were hauling in nearly fifty percent of national income. During the liberal era that ratio was cut down to about one-third. Now it is back up near half again, giving America a level of income inequality comparable to Third World countries (how do you like them bananas, Republicans?), not industrialized ones. Consider what's happened to executive pay and you can see why. In 1982, CEOs made 42 times more in salary than their average worker. In 2001, that had become 525 times the (very) mean worker salary. So that a CEO now makes in a long afternoon what his employees make in an entire year.

If you think that's messed up, you'll

love what the right has done to the federal government's finances. Remember when conservatives used to win elections by railing at "tax-and-spend liberals"? Well, it turns out that they're borrow-and-spend-even-more conservatives. That most revered deity of the right, Saint Ron, used his magic powers of voodoo economics to quadruple the national debt when he came to office. Meanwhile, George W. Bush has shown that he can out-Reagan Reagan. He took an all-time record surplus and turned it into an all-time record deficit. Today, the national debt stands at an astonishing nine trillion dollars. That's more than \$60,000 a piece for every taxpayer in America, plus an additional \$2,000 or so more thrown on the pile per year, plus mounting, compounding interest on all this. In 2006, the federal government spent over \$400 billion paying off interest on the debt alone, compared to \$61 billion for education, or \$56 billion for transportation. Some conservative achievement, eh?

Record deficits

Moreover, America, which was an industrial giant during the liberal era, is today running record-breaking trade deficits as well, as we buy from everyone else and they take a pass on whatever it is we're selling these days. The figure just jumped another 8.2 percent last year, for a total of \$860 billion per year, or 6.5 percent of our total economy, which is also a record. There are no doubt many reasons for this, but for sure conservative trade policies and tax breaks for corporations that export American jobs contributed mightily.

Believe it or not, though, the difference between liberals and conservatives is even more striking on the social dimension of ideology than the economic one, despite the fiscal carnage detailed in the preceding paragraphs. Remember how people like Trent Lott pitched in while liberals bled in the streets to end a hundred years of Jim Crow? What's that you say? You don't? My gosh, how soon they forget! Surely you remember all those conservatives lining the ramparts through the difficult battles for civil rights, women's rights and gay rights, no?

Yeah, well, me neither. That's because they weren't there. Nor were they at home watching TV either (unless it was *All In The Family*, as they cheered on Archie). No, they weren't helping, and they weren't passively ignoring these battles. Indeed, they were precisely the problem. They were the other side. It was conservatives who fought equality every step of the way, and who still do, although sometimes less overtly than before. Remember Richard Nixon's Southern Strategy using race issues to peel off disaffected racist whites from the Democratic Party?

Remember how Ronald Reagan – in one of the most disgusting episodes of American politics ever – launched his 1980 campaign for the presidency in Philadelphia, Mississippi, famous home to the murder of three civil rights workers during the 1960s? Remember how George H. W. Bush used the Willie Horton ad to win the presidency? Remember how his son's party disenfranchised black voters en masse in Florida

in 2000, and Ohio in 2004?

Remember how conservatives couldn't abide the simple statement of sexual equality found in the Equal Rights Amendment, and had it killed? Remember how these supposed paragons of small government have fought to keep control over women's bodies? Or how they fight to keep discrimination or hate crime laws from applying to gays? Or how they used gay marriage as a campaign issue purely to score political points?

Sexual sense?

These are the people who are leaving legions of Americans to suffer with potentially curable diseases because their obsessions with all things sexual even extends to stem cells. These are the people who think inoculating teenage girls against cervical cancer will promote promiscuity, and thus would rather have the cancers. (Makes sense, doesn't it? Remember when you were a teen and thinking about having sex, but decided not to on account of your fear of cervical cancer?) These are the people who see no reason why the cops shouldn't be allowed to break down your door and arrest you for sleeping with the wrong kind of consenting adult. These are the people who think the United States government should be in the business of legislating medical treatment in personal family tragedies like Terri Schiavo's. These are the folks who rail against Ahmadinejad's theocracy there while simultaneously trying to impose Falwell's here.

Quite a record, eh? Ah, but we're not done yet. You can also thank conserva-

Remember how George H. W. Bush used the Willie Horton ad to win the presidency? Remember how his son's party disenfranchised black voters en masse in Florida in 2000, and Ohio in 2004?

CONSERVATISM'S END

That makes your country the proud owner of the highest incarceration rate in the world, ladies and gentlemen. Higher than Russia. Higher than South Africa. And about five to eight times higher than comparable industrialized democracies in Europe and elsewhere

tives for our lovely criminal (in)justice system, complete with the international shame of the death penalty. Did you know that for the half century prior to the 1970s, America's incarceration total remained fairly flat at about 330,000 people nationally? Can't have that! In the conservative era, that figure has increased six-fold. That makes your country the proud owner of the highest incarceration rate in the world, ladies and gentlemen. Higher than Russia. Higher than South Africa. And about five to eight times higher than comparable industrialized democracies in Europe and elsewhere, even though we don't have the highest crime rate among those countries. It also makes something else, too – namely, a boatload of money for the private owners of our new prison-industrial complex. At least we can feel good that these prisoners are off the streets where they'd be harming us. Until, that is, we realize that more than sixty percent of them are behind bars for nonviolent offenses. Watch what happens when that no longer satiates the corporate prison interests sufficiently. All they have to do is get their fully-owned conservative legislators to outlaw listening to hip-hop or putting sugar in tea, and have them build more privately-managed jails. Then they can incarcerate another million people. More fun and profits with criminal justice!

And if you like that, you'll dig conservative foreign policy successes! What's not to like about war? Vietnam, anybody? (Yes, Johnson was a liberal, but his Vietnam policy was absolutely not.) Iraq? While liberals have built in-

ternational organizations and regimes to control arms proliferation, jail human rights violators, address hunger and prevent environmental degradation, conservatives have had a slightly different agenda. Today, it can be seen on full display in Iraq, where the neo-conservatives of the Project for a New American Century have turned America into a hated country worldwide, forever tainted by their aggression, torture and lies. Where our own intelligence agencies tell us that we've created an entire new generation of jihadists who will be attacking us in the future.

Your kids, not theirs

Where the lives of over 3000 Americans and probably close to a million Iraqi civilians have been extinguished for transparently fraudulent purposes. Where already half a trillion dollars has been spent, and likely two trillion will be blown before it is over. Where we've turned Iraq into a civil war zone, and potentially could condemn the entire Middle-East to the same fate, on the scale of a world war. Where we could potentially create a worldwide economic depression if the flow of oil is further interrupted by this war. And where American security has been dramatically decreased by tying up all our land forces in a worse than useless war of choice, leaving them unavailable should a real emergency occur (abroad or at home – like Greensburg, Kansas just found out this week).

No wonder, with such resounding success, that these same neoconservatives want to pour more soldiers and

more money into Iraq, and then go after the big prize, Iran. With, um, your kids doing the fighting and dying, of course, not theirs. (But please don't mention that last part to anyone in the media. It's a bit too much cognitive dissonance when you're busy basking in the warm glow of the very same folks in Washington you're supposed to be watchdogging.)

You might be thinking by now that conservatives really have an abysmal track record on every issue imaginable, but we're actually just getting started here. So far we've only been talking about recent history. It actually goes much, much deeper. Wanna guess which side our good friends from the right were on during the American Revolution? (Hint: they were called Tories back then too.) Wanna guess how they felt about the abolitionists trying to end slavery in the nineteenth century? How about women's suffrage a hundred years ago? How about the civil rights or environmental movements? Social Security? Medicare? All opposed by conservatives of their time, and many still today.

Not for nothing did someone once say that "Conservatives are the worshipers of dead radicals." So true. Everything that progressives got right in their day, conservatives got wrong, only to figure out later. Americans would do well, to choose just a single example, to remember how the right treated Martin Luther King in his day. I can promise you they weren't clamoring to make national holidays in his honor back then.

If this historical criticism seems un-

fair, it is only because regressives would like very much for you to forget just how consistently they've been on the wrong side of history, lest you should apply those lessons to contemporary debates. Who do you want to trust? The folks who brought you the American Revolution, or those who supported George III? The people who ended slavery or those who wanted to keep it? Those who tried to give women the vote, or those who fought against equality? And as you're thinking today about the devastation headed our way from global warming, who should we listen to – the people who created environmental protections in America, or those who fought for dirty air, dirty water and increased corporate profits? Tough call, eh?

Martinis and good health

Still not convinced? It was no less than William F. Buckley himself, easily the most significant conservative non-official of the last half-century, who defined conservatism as the willingness to "stand athwart history, yelling Stop." Personally, I can't believe he was candid enough to admit to that, though I guess he figured the rest of us wouldn't be reading his little magazine. But, hey, how does that strike you as a rallying cry? Racial equality? Stop! Sexual equality? Stop! Nuclear disarmament? Stop! Environmental protection? Stop! Social Security and Medicare? Stop, and Stop again! It's all good, people (especially if, like William F., you're a nice rich white man living quite well, thank you very much, on your lovely Connecticut estate). Who needs change

Americans would do well, to choose just a single example, to remember how the right treated Martin Luther King in his day. I can promise you they weren't clamoring to make national holidays in his honor back then

CONSERVATISM'S END

While Jimmy Carter was out there trying to explain the long term value of a human rights based foreign policy, Ronald Reagan was talking about kicking some ass, goddamit

when you have martinis and good help to fetch them?

I don't carry a brief for American liberalism. My own politics run closer to European style social democracy, which I think is about the best political and economic system humans have yet to invent, balancing personal freedoms with social responsibility at home and abroad. But it is ludicrous that anyone should believe that conservatism (which has today morphed into the even nastier strain of regressivism) has been more successful than liberalism in American history, or even that it has been successful at all.

We, as a society, have choices to make. We can avoid unnecessary wars, or not. We can have a 40-hour work week, or not. We can have Brown vs. the Board, or not. We can have the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts or not. We can have equal pay for women, or not. We can have reproductive freedom, or not. We can have the Voting Rights Act, or not. We can have nuclear nonproliferation, or not. We can make hate crimes illegal, or not. And on, and on, and on. These are simple, straightforward choices, and even the rather-less-than-progressive American public is strongly in favor of the liberal position on these issues, almost right down the line.

Really, I'm sorry, but it is nothing short of fall-outta-your-chair ridiculous that conservatism isn't just laughed off the horizon as the political equivalent of Moonieism (to which it actually bears a whole bunch of real world connections, starting with ownership of that house organ, The Washington

Times). And why hasn't it been? I see a number of reasons.

First, who would you pick in a street fight, the guy with a knife and the willingness to use it, or the guy with a stack of briefing papers who is pondering the philosophical morality of self-defense? Robert Frost once said, "A liberal man is too broadminded to take his own side in a quarrel", and I often think he was right. Conservative positions fit nicely on (inane) bumper-stickers, liberal ones take sixty-five paragraphs to explain the seventeen policy options, each with twelve nuances and thirty caveats.

Human rights v. kicking ass

While Jimmy Carter was out there trying to explain the long term value of a human rights based foreign policy, Ronald Reagan was talking about kicking some ass, goddamit. While Mike Dukakis was droning on reading from piles of government commission reports, Lee Atwater was pummeling him with a single picture of a scary black man. As John Kerry parsed the intricacies of his anti-terrorism voting record, Karl Rove scared Americans silly, then offered them protection. See what I mean?

Second, conservative ideas tend to win among the poorly informed, and Americans are very badly informed. To pick just the most egregious example, consider the 69 percent of us who thought in 2003 that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in 9/11. A dumbed-down public is a conservative marketing chief's wet dream, and in general, conservatives have been mas-

terful at playing a lousy hand through effective marketing, while liberals have blown election after election in which the public agreed with them on issues, but remarkably inept candidates couldn't have found a message if they'd been locked overnight in a post office.

Third, we also live in a moment of declining American power, which creates a latent uneasiness that benefits conservatism's me-first message, its worship of a happier faux past (not to mention faux pas), and its insecurity-soothing projected muscularity.

Conservatives have also profited from liberalism's failures. The once broad and cohesive New Deal coalition has splintered in recent decades into a hundred specific advocacy groups, with little strategic coordination between them. And, more importantly, liberals simply lost the courage of their convictions. When Reagan started throwing punches, they threw (in the) towels, and tried to turn themselves into little Republiclones.

Finally, in a sense, liberalism is a victim of its own successes. It achieved much of what it might have been expected to achieve, especially in the American context of a highly individualistic political culture. The main exceptions to that, of course, are national healthcare (which is probably now finally just about viable, only sixty years after Truman first proposed it), and global warming (which also may be ripe for action with the right leadership). Of course, there is lots else which could and should be done. But much of the appeal of liberalism at this point is negative. As in, "Hi there, we're the nice

people who won't lie you into disastrous wars, bankrupt the country, export your job, or cause catastrophic environmental destruction."

What is crucial at the moment is that individual issues – the debt, the war, global warming, Katrina, etc. – not be treated as individual issues, but rather as the planks of an ideological platform that must be promptly escorted to its own funeral. In 1988, I watched Michael Dukakis get hammered across an entire campaign for being a "liberal", only to stand by in silence until literally the last day, when he appeared in San Francisco and gingerly admitted to it. (By the way, Mike, what the hell were you doing there on the last day of a campaign you were about to lose? Trolling for the votes of San Francisco's seventeen registered Republicans?)

What Dukakis should have been saying all along is "If providing a decent retirement for our seniors makes me a liberal, then damn right, I'm a liberal. If keeping America out of foolish and harmful wars makes me a liberal, then damn right, I'm a liberal. If protecting the environment makes me a liberal, then damn right, I'm a liberal. If being fiscally responsible and not handing our children their parents' massive debt makes me a liberal, then damn right, I'm a liberal." And so on.

To a very large extent, politics is a war of framing. At this moment in time, liberals are nearly drowning in ammunition. But they lack the conviction to fight, and they lack the strategic sense to put that ammunition into a coherent frame. Conservatives, on the other

Liberals simply lost the courage of their convictions. When Reagan started throwing punches, they threw (in the) towels, and tried to turn themselves into little Republiclones

CONSERVATISM'S END

Progressives must seize this moment of maximal opportunity to reframe and thus bury conservative ideology

hand, have been masterful at selling a framing based on absurd anecdotes and wholesale falsehoods. Today, far too many Americans believe that corporate actors are good and the public sector is bad. That public servants are 'bureaucrats' and regulation of industry is 'red tape'. That, in Ronald Reagan's famous phrase, "government is not the solution, government is the problem" (except the military, of course, where waste and fraud couldn't possibly exist because it's not really government...). It is a measure of how good the salesmanship has been, and how credulous the customer, that you could convince citizens in a democracy that the government they chose was the problem. All while being that very government.

Progressives must seize this moment of maximal opportunity to reframe and thus bury conservative ideology. It is worse than the ideology of stasis. It is worse than the historic opponent of liberty and equality. It is worse than the international aggressor or the guardian of those whose actions are toxic to the

public interest. Today's regressive conservatives are predatory kleptocrats who have turned America into a disaster on every front, precisely because they never came to power for any other purpose than to pillage.

Americans will see that if we help them to do so. They already see the pieces, and more of those will be exposed with every Henry Waxman subpoena and every self-serving (and self-preserving) memoir from former administration officials. We just need to do what conservatives have done so successfully these last decades, and have done in the complete absence of the truth that makes our task so much easier than theirs. We need to package this frame, do it boldly and confidently, and repeat it relentlessly, as if we were George W. Bush endlessly chanting the word "terrorism." **CT**

David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. More of his work can be found at his website, www.regressiveantidote.net.



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IN THE DEADLY WEB OF THE INTERNET

BY ROBERT FISK

Could it possibly be that the security men who guard the frontiers of North America are supporting Holocaust denial? Alas, it's true. Here's the story.

Taner Akcam is the distinguished Turkish scholar at the University of Minnesota who, with immense courage, proved the facts of the Armenian genocide — the deliberate mass murder of up to a million and a half Armenians by the Ottoman Turkish authorities in 1915 — from Turkish documents and archives. His book *A Shameful Act* was published to great critical acclaim in Britain and the United States.

He is now, needless to say, being threatened with legal action in Turkey under the infamous Law 301 — which makes a crime of insulting “Turkishness” — but it's probably par for the course for a man who was granted political asylum in Germany after receiving an eight-year prison sentence in his own country for articles he had written in a student journal; Amnesty International had already named him a prisoner of conscience.

But Mr Akcam has now become a different kind of prisoner: an inmate of the internet hate machine, the circle of hell in which any political filth or personal libel can be hurled at the innocent without any recourse to the law, to libel lawyers or to common decency. The Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink was misquoted on the internet for allegedly claiming that Turkish blood was “poisonous”; this total lie — Dink never said such a thing — prompted a young man to murder him in an Istanbul street.

But Taner Akcam's experience is potentially far more serious for all of us. As he wrote in a letter to me this month, “Additional to the criminal investigation (law 301) in Turkey, there is a hate campaign going on here in the USA, as a result of which I cannot travel internationally any more... My recent detention at the Montreal airport — apparently on the basis of anonymous insertions in my Wikipedia biography — signals a disturbing new phase in a Turkish campaign of intimidation that has intensified since the November 2006 publication of my

Mr Akcam has now become a different kind of prisoner: an inmate of the internet hate machine, the circle of hell in which any political filth or personal libel can be hurled at the innocent without any recourse to the law, to libel lawyers or to common decency

The immigration officer took notes and made phone calls to his bosses. Akcam was given a one-week visa and the Canadian officer showed him – at Akcam's insistence – a piece of paper which was the obvious reason for his temporary detention

book.”

Akcam was travelling to lecture in Montreal and took the Northwest Airlines flight from Minneapolis on 16 February this year. The Canadian immigration officer, Akcam says, was “courteous” – but promptly detained him at Montreal’s Trudeau airport. Even odder, the Canadian immigration officer asked him why he needed to be detained. Akcam tells me he gave the man a brief history of the genocide and of the campaign of hatred against him in the US by Turkish groups “controlled by ... Turkish diplomats” who “spread propaganda stating that I am a member of a terrorist organisation.”

All this went on for four hours while the immigration officer took notes and made phone calls to his bosses. Akcam was given a one-week visa and the Canadian officer showed him – at Akcam’s insistence – a piece of paper which was the obvious reason for his temporary detention.

“I recognised the page at once,” Akcam says. “The photo was a still from a 2005 documentary on the Armenian genocide... The still photo and the text beneath it comprised my biography in the English language edition of Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia which anyone in the world can modify at any time. For the last year ... my Wikipedia biography has been persistently vandalised by anonymous ‘contributors’ intent on labelling me as a terrorist. The same allegations have been repeatedly scrawled, like gangland graffiti, as ‘customer reviews’ of my books at Amazon.”

Akcam was released, but his reflec-

tions on this very disturbing incident are worth recording. “It was unlikely, to say the least, that a Canadian immigration officer found out that I was coming to Montreal, took the sole initiative to research my identity on the internet, discovered the archived version of my Wikipedia biography, printed it out on 16 February, and showed it to me – voilà! – as a result.”

But this was not the end. Prior to his Canadian visit, two Turkish-American websites had been hinting that Akcam’s “terrorist activities” should be of interest to American immigration authorities. And sure enough, Akcam was detained yet again – for another hour – by US Homeland Security officers at Montreal airport before boarding his flight at Montreal for Minnesota two days later.

Detaining the innocent

On this occasion, he says that the American officer – US Homeland Security operates at the Canadian airport – gave him a warning: “Mr Akcam, if you don’t retain an attorney and correct this issue, every entry and exit from the country is going to be problematic. We recommend that you do not travel in the meantime and that you try to get this information removed from your customs dossier.”

So let’s get this clear. US and Canadian officials now appear to be detaining the innocent on the grounds of hate postings on the internet. And it is the innocent – guilty until proved otherwise, I suppose – who must now pay lawyers to protect them from Homeland Security and the internet. But as

Akcam says, there is nothing he can do.

“Allegations against me, posted by the Assembly of Turkish American Associations, Turkish Forum and ‘Tall Armenia Tale’ (a Holocaust denial website) have been copy-pasted and recycled through innumerable websites and e-groups ever since I arrived in America. By now, my name in close proximity to the English word ‘terrorist’ turns up in well over 10,000 web pages.”

I’m not surprised. There is no end to the internet’s circle of hate. What does shock me, however, is that the men and women chosen to guard their nations against Osama bin Laden and al-Qa’ida are reading this dirt and are prepared to detain an honourable scholar such as Taner Akcam on the basis of it.

I don’t think the immigration lads are to blame. I once remember listen-

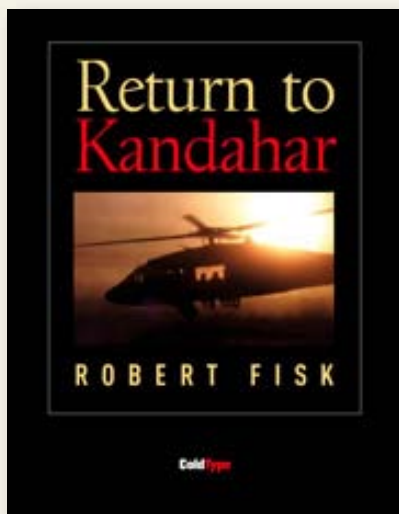
ing to a Canadian official at Toronto airport carefully explaining to a Palestinian visitor that he was not required to tell any police officer about his religion or personal beliefs, that he should feel safe in Canada.

No, it’s their bosses in Ottawa and Washington I wonder about. Put very simply, how much smut is the US and Canadian immigration authorities taking off the internet? And how much of it is now going to be flung at us when we queue at airports to go about our lawful business? **CT**

Robert Fisk is the award-winning Middle east correspondent for London newspaper, The Independent, where this originally appeared. His latest book The Great War For Civilisation, is now available in paperback

“By now, my name in close proximity to the English word ‘terrorist’ turns up in well over 10,000 web pages”

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ANTI-CAPITALISM IN FIVE MINUTES

BY ROBERT JENSEN

Capitalism – or, more accurately, the predatory corporate capitalism that defines and dominates our lives – will be our death if we don’t escape it

We know that capitalism is not just the most sensible way to organize an economy but is now the only possible way to organize an economy. We know that dissenters to this conventional wisdom can, and should, be ignored. There’s no longer even any need to persecute such heretics; they are obviously irrelevant.

How do we know all this? Because we are told so, relentlessly – typically by those who have the most to gain from such a claim, most notably those in the business world and their functionaries and apologists in schools, universities, mass media, and mainstream politics. Capitalism is not a choice, but simply is, like a state of nature. Maybe not like a state of nature, but the state of nature. To contest capitalism these days is like arguing against the air that we breathe. Arguing against capitalism, we’re told, is simply crazy.

We are told, over and over, that capitalism is not just the system we have, but the only system we can ever have. Yet for many, something nags at us

about such a claim. Could this really be the only option? We’re told we shouldn’t even think about such things. But we can’t help thinking – is this really the “end of history,” in the sense that big thinkers have used that phrase to signal the final victory of global capitalism? If this is the end of history in that sense, we wonder, can the actual end of the planet far behind?

We wonder, we fret, and these thoughts nag at us – for good reason. Capitalism – or, more accurately, the predatory corporate capitalism that defines and dominates our lives – will be our death if we don’t escape it. Crucial to progressive politics is finding the language to articulate that reality, not in outdated dogma that alienates but in plain language that resonates with people. We should be searching for ways to explain to co-workers – radical politics in five minutes or less – why we must abandon predatory corporate capitalism. If we don’t, we may well be facing the end times, and such an end will bring rupture not rapture.

Here’s my shot at the language for

this argument.

Capitalism is admittedly an incredibly productive system that has created a flood of goods unlike anything the world has ever seen. It also is a system that is fundamentally (1) inhuman, (2) anti-democratic, and (3) unsustainable. Capitalism has given those of us in the First World lots of stuff (most of it of marginal or questionable value) in exchange for our souls, our hope for progressive politics, and the possibility of a decent future for children.

In short, either we change or we die – spiritually, politically, literally.

1. Capitalism is inhuman

There is a theory behind contemporary capitalism. We're told that because we are greedy, self-interested animals, an economic system must reward greedy, self-interested behavior if we are to thrive economically.

Are we greedy and self-interested? Of course. At least I am, sometimes. But we also just as obviously are capable of compassion and selflessness. We certainly can act competitively and aggressively, but we also have the capacity for solidarity and cooperation. In short, human nature is wide-ranging. Our actions are rooted in our nature, but all we really know about that nature is that it is widely variable. In situations where compassion and solidarity are the norm, we tend to act that way. In situations where competitiveness and aggression are rewarded, most people tend toward such behavior.

Why is it that we must choose an economic system that undermines the most decent aspects of our nature and

strengthens the most inhuman? Because, we're told, that's just the way people are. What evidence is there of that? Look around, we're told, at how people behave. Everywhere we look, we see greed and the pursuit of self-interest. So, the proof that these greedy, self-interested aspects of our nature are dominant is that, when forced into a system that rewards greed and self-interested behavior, people often act that way. Doesn't that seem a bit circular?

2. Capitalism is anti-democratic

This one is easy. Capitalism is a wealth-concentrating system. If you concentrate wealth in a society, you concentrate power. Is there any historical example to the contrary?

For all the trappings of formal democracy in the contemporary United States, everyone understands that the wealthy dictates the basic outlines of the public policies that are acceptable to the vast majority of elected officials. People can and do resist, and an occasional politician joins the fight, but such resistance takes extraordinary effort. Those who resist win victories, some of them inspiring, but to date concentrated wealth continues to dominate. Is this any way to run a democracy?

If we understand democracy as a system that gives ordinary people a meaningful way to participate in the formation of public policy, rather than just a role in ratifying decisions made by the powerful, then it's clear that capitalism and democracy are mutually exclusive. Let's make this concrete. In our system, we believe that regular elections with the one-person/one-

If we understand democracy as a system that gives ordinary people a meaningful way to participate in the formation of public policy, rather than just a role in ratifying decisions made by the powerful, then it's clear that capitalism and democracy are mutually exclusive

Capitalism is not, of course, the only unsustainable system that humans have devised, but it is the most obviously unsustainable system, and it's the one in which we are stuck. It's the one that we are told is inevitable and natural, like the air

vote rule, along with protections for freedom of speech and association, guarantee political equality. When I go to the polls, I have one vote. When Bill Gates goes the polls, he has one vote. Bill and I both can speak freely and associate with others for political purposes. Therefore, as equal citizens in our fine democracy, Bill and I have equal opportunities for political power. Right?

3. Capitalism is unsustainable

This one is even easier. Capitalism is a system based on the idea of unlimited growth. The last time I checked, this is a finite planet. There are only two ways out of this one. Perhaps we will be hoping to a new planet soon. Or perhaps, because we need to figure out ways to cope with these physical limits, we will invent ever-more complex technologies to transcend those limits.

Both those positions are equally delusional. Delusions may bring temporary comfort, but they don't solve problems. They tend, in fact, to cause more problems. Those problems seem to be piling up. Capitalism is not, of course, the only unsustainable system that humans have devised, but it is the most obviously unsustainable system, and it's the one in which we are stuck. It's the one that we are told is inevitable and natural, like the air.

A tale of two acronyms

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's famous response to a question about challenges to capitalism was TINA – There Is No Alternative. If there is no alternative, anyone who

questions capitalism is crazy.

Here's another, more common, acronym about life under a predatory corporate capitalism: TGIF – Thank God It's Friday. It's a phrase that communicates a sad reality for many working in this economy – the jobs we do are not rewarding, not enjoyable, and fundamentally not worth doing. We do them to survive. Then on Friday we go out and get drunk to forget about that reality, hoping we can find something during the weekend that makes it possible on Monday to, in the words of one songwriter, “get up and do it again.”

Remember, an economic system doesn't just produce goods. It produces people as well. Our experience of work shapes us. Our experience of consuming those goods shapes us. Increasingly, we are a nation of unhappy people consuming miles of aisles of cheap goods, hoping to dull the pain of unfulfilling work. Is this who we want to be?

We're told TINA in a TGIF world. Doesn't that seem a bit strange? Is there really no alternative to such a world? Of course there is. Anything that is the product of human choices can be chosen differently. We don't need to spell out a new system in all its specifics to realize there always are alternatives. We can encourage the existing institutions that provide a site of resistance (such as labor unions) while we experiment with new forms (such as local cooperatives). But the first step is calling out the system for what it is, without guarantees of what's to come.

Home and abroad

In the First World, we struggle with this

alienation and fear. We often don't like the values of the world around us; we often don't like the people we've become; we often are afraid of what's to come of us. But in the First World, most of us eat regularly. That's not the case everywhere. Let's focus not only on the conditions we face within a predatory corporate capitalist system, living in the most affluent country in the history of the world, but also put this in a global context.

Half the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day. That's more than 3 billion people. Just over half of the population of sub-Saharan Africa lives on less than \$1 a day. That's more than 300 million people.

How about one more statistic: About 500 children in Africa die from poverty-related diseases, and the majority of those deaths could be averted with simple medicines or insecticide-treated nets. That's 500 children – not every year, or every month or every week. That's not 500 children every day. Poverty-related diseases claim the lives of 500 children an hour in Africa.

When we try to hold onto our humanity, statistics like that can make us crazy. But don't get any crazy ideas about changing this system. Remember TINA: There is no alternative to predatory corporate capitalism.

Eminently sane

One of the common responses I hear

when I critique capitalism is, "Well, that may all be true, but we have to be realistic and do what's possible." By that logic, to be realistic is to accept a system that is inhuman, anti-democratic, and unsustainable. To be realistic we are told we must capitulate to a system that steals our souls, enslaves us to concentrated power, and will someday destroy the planet.

But rejecting and resisting a predatory corporate capitalism is not crazy. It is an eminently sane position. Holding onto our humanity is not crazy. Defending democracy is not crazy. And struggling for a sustainable future is not crazy.

What is truly crazy is falling for the con that an inhuman, anti-democratic, and unsustainable system – one that leaves half the world's people in abject poverty – is all that there is, all that there ever can be, all that there ever will be.

If that were true, then soon there will be nothing left, for anyone.

I do not believe it is realistic to accept such a fate. If that's being realistic, I'll take crazy any day of the week. **CT**

*Robert Jensen is a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin. His latest book is *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity* (South End Press, 2007). His articles can be found online at*

<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/index.html>

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THE GREATEST THREAT TO CHOICE

BY CHRIS HEDGES

The relentless drive against abortion by the Christian right – the first salvo having been fired with the 5-to-4 Supreme Court decision last month to uphold the federal ban on the procedure known as “partial birth abortion” – has nothing to do with the protection of life

Jeniece Learned stood amid a crowd of earnest-looking men and women, many with small gold crosses in their lapels or around their necks, in a hotel lobby in Valley Forge, Pa. She had an easy smile and a thick mane of black, shoulder-length hair. She was carrying a booklet called “Ringing In a Culture of Life,” which was the schedule of the two-day event she was attending, organized by the Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation. The event was “dedicated to the 46 million children who have died from legal abortions since 1973 and the mothers and fathers who mourn their loss.”

Learned, who had driven five hours from a town outside Youngstown, Ohio, was raised Jewish. She wore a gold Star of David around her neck with a Christian cross inset in the middle of the design. She stood up in one of the morning sessions, attended by about 300 people, most of them women. The speaker, Alveda King, niece of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had asked if there were any “post-abortive” women present. The most fervent ac-

tivists in the pro-life movement have usually had abortions, with large numbers admitting to multiple abortions.

Learned runs a small pregnancy counseling clinic called Pregnancy Services of Western Pennsylvania, in Sharon, where she tries to talk young girls and women, most of them poor, out of having abortions. She speaks in local public schools, promoting sexual abstinence as the only acceptable form of contraception. And she has found in the fight against abortion, and in her conversion, a structure, purpose and meaning that previously eluded her.

Assault on pleasure

The relentless drive against abortion by the Christian right – the first salvo having been fired with the 5-to-4 Supreme Court decision last month to uphold the federal ban on the procedure known as “partial birth abortion” – has nothing to do with the protection of life. It is, rather, a cover for a wider and more pernicious assault against the ability of women to control their own bodies, the use of contraception and

sexual pleasure. The movement openly conflates contraceptives with devices or substances that cause abortion. It holds up as heroes of “conscience” those pharmacists who refuse to sell contraceptives. It works to block over-the-counter sales of Plan B emergency contraceptive pills. It peddles, with hundreds of millions in tax dollars handed to the movement by the Bush administration, abstinence-only sex-ed curricula and opposes a vaccine against the HPV virus, the major cause of cervical cancer, claiming it would promote promiscuity.

The denial of contraception, as is well documented, increases the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions. And abortion is never going to go away. If it again becomes illegal, the rich, as in the past, will find ways to provide abortions for their wives, mistresses and girlfriends, and the poor will die in unhygienic back rooms. But since this is a war with a wider agenda, abortion statistics and facts do not count. The Christian right fears pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, which it sees as degrading, corrupting and tainted. For many, their own experiences with sex – coupled with their descent into addictions and often sexual and domestic abuse before they found Christ – have led them to build a movement that creates an external rigidity to cope with the chaos of human existence, a chaos that overwhelmed them. They do not trust their own urges, their capacity for self-restraint or judgment. The Christian right permits its followers to project evil outward, a convenient escape for people

unable to face the darkness and the psychological torments within them.

The leaders of this movement understand that the only emotion that cannot be subsumed into communal life, which they seek to dominate and control, is love. They fear the power of love, especially when magnified and expressed through tender, sexual relationships, which remove couples from their control. Sex, when not a utilitarian form of procreation, is dangerous.

They seek to fashion a world where good and evil are clearly defined and upheld by the nation’s judicial system. The battle against abortion is a battle to build a society where pleasure and freedom, where the capacity of the individual and especially women to make choices, and indeed even love itself, are banished. And this is why pro-life groups oppose contraception – even for those who are married. The fight against abortion is the facade for a wider fight against the right of an individual in a democracy.

What kind of human being?

Army of God, a pro-life organization that holds up as Christian “heroes” those who murder abortion providers, defines birth control as another form of abortion, as do many other pro-life groups. In the “Birth Control Is Evil” section of their website it reads: “Birth control is evil and a sin. Birth control is anti-baby and anti-child. ...Why would you stop your own child from being conceived or born? What kind of human being are you?”

Learned’s life, before she was saved, was typically chaotic and painful. Her

Abortion is never going to go away. If it again becomes illegal, the rich, as in the past, will find ways to provide abortions for their wives, mistresses and girlfriends, and the poor will die in unhygienic back rooms

The fight against abortion is a battle against a culture she and those in the movement despise

childhood was stolen from her. She was sexually abused by a close family member. Her mother periodically woke Learned and her younger sister and two younger brothers in the middle of the night to flee landlords who wanted back rent. The children were bundled into the car and driven in darkness to a strange apartment in another town. Her mother worked nights and weekends as a bartender. Learned, the oldest, often had to run the home. She got pregnant in high school and had an abortion.

“There was a lot of fighting,” she said. “I remember my dad hitting my mom one time and him going to jail. I don’t have a lot of memories, mind you, before eighth grade because of the sexual abuse. When he divorced my mom, he divorced us, too.”

“My grandfather committed suicide, my mom and my dad both tried suicide, my brothers tried suicide,” she said. “In my family, there was no hope. The only way to solve problems when they got bad was to end your life.”

She eventually married, had a born-again experience and began taking classes at Pacific Christian College in Orange County in California. During a chapel service an anti-abortion group, Living Alternative, showed a film called “The Silent Scream.”

“You see in this movie this baby backing up trying to get away from this suction tube,” she said. “And, its mouth is open and it is like this baby is screaming. I flipped out. It was at that moment that God just took this veil that I had over my eyes for the last eight years. I couldn’t breathe. I was hy-

perventilating. I ran outside. One of the girls followed me from Living Alternative. And she said, ‘Did you commit your life to Christ?’ And I said, ‘I did.’ And she said, ‘Did you ask for your forgiveness of sins?’ And I said, ‘I did.’ And she goes, ‘Does that mean all your sins, or does that mean some of them?’ And I said, ‘I guess it means all of them.’ So she said, ‘Basically, you are thinking God hasn’t forgiven you for your abortion because that is a worse sin than any of your other sins that you have done.’”

The film ushered her into the fight to make abortion illegal. Her activism, like that of many women in the movement, became atonement for her own abortion.

She struggled with severe depression after she gave birth to her daughter Rachel. When she came home from the hospital she was unable to care for her infant. She thought she saw an 8-year-old boy standing next to her bed. It was, she is sure, the image of the son she had “murdered.”

“I started crying and asking God over and over again to forgive me,” she remembered. “I had murdered his child. I asked him to forgive me over and over again. It was just incredible. I was possessed. On the fourth day I remember hearing God’s voice. ‘I have your baby, now get up!’ It was the most incredibly freeing and peaceful moment. I got up and I showered and I ate. I just knew it was God’s voice.”

Culture war

The fight against abortion is a battle against a culture she and those in the

movement despise. It is a culture they believe betrayed them. The rigidity of the new belief system, the sanctification of hatred toward those who would “murder” the unborn or contaminate America with the godless creed of “secular humanism,” fosters feelings of righteousness and virtue. But it also means destroying all competing communities. The sense of entitlement and inclusiveness, brought on by the certitude of belief, is matched by the power of destructive fury.

Learned lives in the nation’s Rust Belt. The flight of manufacturing jobs has turned most of the old steel mill towns around her into wastelands of poverty and urban decay. The days when steel workers could make middle-class salaries are a distant and cherished memory.

She lives amid America’s vast and growing class of dispossessed, those tens of millions of working poor, 30 million of whom make less than \$8.70 an hour, the official poverty level for a family of four.

Most economists contend that it takes at least twice this amount to provide basic necessities to a family of four. These low-wage jobs, which come without benefits or job security, have meant billions in profits for corporations that no longer feel the pressure or the need to take care of their workers. But this new American landscape has

also bred a profound despair and hopelessness, as well as physical destruction of community that fuels the Christian right.

The war to “protect life,” to crush “the culture of death,” is a war against the open society. It is a war to push back the gains in women’s rights, in personal choice, in the power of the individual to form his or her own life. It is a war that seeks to refashion America into a place where external forms of repression, imposed by the government, are used in a bid to contain the brokenness, desperation and emotional turmoil of those Americans whom we, as a society, betrayed.

It is, in short, a war of revenge. And until we re-enfranchise these Americans into society, until we give them hope and alleviate the economic and social blights that have plunged them into the arms of demagogues and charlatans who promise a mythical, unachievable Christian paradise and utopia, we will have to face a growing assault on our personal liberties and freedoms. **CT**

Chris Hedges, who graduated from Harvard Divinity School and was for nearly two decades a foreign correspondent for The New York Times, is the author of American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America.

These low-wage jobs, which come without benefits or job security, have meant billions in profits for corporations that no longer feel the pressure or the need to take care of their workers

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‘SORRY WE SHOT YOUR KID... BUT HERE’S \$500’

BY GREG MITCHELL

What price (when we do pay) do we place on the life of a 9-year-old boy, shot by one of our soldiers who mistook his book bag for a bomb satchel?

The most revealing new information on Iraq – guaranteed to make readers sad or angry, or both – is found not in any press dispatch but in a collection of several hundred PDFs posted on the Web last month.

Here you will find, for example, that when the U.S. drops a bomb that goes awry, lands in an orchard, and does not detonate – until after a couple of kids go out to take a look – our military does not feel any moral or legal reason to compensate the family of the dead child because this is, after all, broadly speaking, a “combat situation.”

Also: What price (when we do pay) do we place on the life of a 9-year-old boy, shot by one of our soldiers who mistook his book bag for a bomb satchel? Would you believe \$500? And when we shoot an Iraqi journalist on a bridge we shell out \$2500 to his widow – but why not the measly \$5000 she had requested?

This, and much more, is found in the new PDFs of Iraqi claims, which are usually denied.

Last June, The Boston Globe and

The New York Times revealed that a local custom in Iraq known as “solatia” had now been adapted by the U.S. military – it means families receive financial compensation for physical damage or a loss of life. The Globe revealed that payoffs had “skyrocketed from just under \$5 million in 2004 to almost \$20 million last year, according to Pentagon financial data.”

In a column at that time, I asked: How common is the practice? And how many unnecessary deaths do the numbers seem to suggest?

It’s necessary to ask because the press generally has been denied information on civilian killings and, in recent years, it has become too dangerous in much of Iraq for reporters to go out and investigate shootings or alleged atrocities.

Now we have more evidence, thanks to an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) request for files on payments by the military. The FOIA request produced 500 case studies, which deserve broad attention.

An Army spokesman told the New York Times that the total payments so

far had reached at least \$32 million. Yet this figure apparently includes only the payments made in this formal claim process that requires official approval. The many other “solatia” or “condolence payments” made informally at a unit commander’s discretion are not always included.

The ACLU site, www.aclu.org, now features a searchable database of reports (the ACLU is seeking more of them in case this is just the tip of the iceberg).

The New York Times commented, “There is no way to know immediately whether disciplinary action or prosecution has resulted from the cases. Soldiers hand out instruction cards after mistakes are made, so Iraqis know where to file claims.”

Exploring the case reports quickly turns disturbing. They often include the scrawled claims by a victim’s family member detailing a horrific accidental or deliberate killing (all names blacked out) and then a ruling by a U.S. Army captain or major with the Foreign Claims Commission.

Occasionally the officer orders a payment, although it can still make you scream, as for example: “Claimant alleges that her two brothers were returning home with groceries from their business, when U.S. troops shot and killed them, thinking they were insurgents with bombs in the bags. I recommend approving this claim in the amount of \$5,000.”

More often the officer denies the claim due to alleged lack of evidence, or threatening behavior by the deceased (usually just failing to stop quickly

enough while driving) or the death occurring in some sort of vague combat situation. Many of the denials seem arbitrary or unfair, particularly when the only reason cited is a “combat exemption” – as in the case of the dead kid in that orchard.

Then there’s this example:

“Claimant’s son and a friend were fishing, in a small boat, 15 kilometers north of Tikrit on the Tigris river at 2200 hours on 31 March 2005. The claimant and his son had fished the Tigris many nights recently, but the father did not join his son this night. U.S. Forces helicopters were flying overhead, like they usually did and there were no problems.

“A U.S. Forces HMMWV patrol pulled up to the beach near where they were fishing. The patrol had spotted and destroyed a boat earlier in the evening that had an RPG in it. They set off an illumination round and then opened fire. The claimant’s only son was shot and killed. His friend was injured, but managed to get the boat to the other side of the river. At the small village across the river they received medical help and were taken to the hospital. But, it was too late for the claimant’s son.

“The claimant and his son were huge supporters of democracy and up to this day held meetings and taught their friends about democracy. The claimant provided two witness statements, medical records, a death certificate, photographs and a scene sketch, all of which supported his claim.

“Opinion: There is sufficient evidence to indicate that U.S. Forces in-

Many of the denials seem arbitrary or unfair, particularly when the only reason cited is a “combat exemption” – as in the case of the dead kid in that orchard

THE COST OF WAR

They tried to appear non-threatening to an American helicopter overhead, holding up their fish "to show they meant no harm," said the report. One was killed anyway

tionally killed the claimant's son. Unfortunately, those forces were involved in security operations at the time. Therefore, this case falls within the combat exception."

Sometimes the Army officer, perhaps feeling a bit guilty for his ruling – or the whole war – authorizes a small payment in "condolence" money, which does not require admitting any wrongdoing on our part. One of the PDFs notes that a U.S. army memo states a maximum condolence payment scale: \$2,500 for death, \$500 for property, \$1,000 for injury.

One payment noted in a report was a little more generous, but loss of property was compensated but not loss of life. The incident involved two fishermen in Tikrit. They tried to appear non-threatening to an American helicopter overhead, holding up their fish "to show they meant no harm," said the report. One was killed anyway. The Army refused to pay for the killing, ruling that it was "combat activity," but approved \$3,500 for a boat, net and cellphone, which all drifted away and were stolen.

To give you more of the flavor, here are some excerpts (with a few typos corrected).

Sept. 3 2005

Claimant alleges that a CF [coalition force] dropped a bomb in his orchard. The bomb allegedly did not explode upon impact. Claimant's son went to investigate and was killed when the UXO detonated. Claimant's cousin was seriously injured in the explosion. A couple of hours later, CF allegedly

took the body and Claimant to LSA Anaconda for medical treatment. In support of their claims, the Claimants have offered witness statements, medical records from LSA Anaconda, and police and judicial reports.

Opinion: Under AR 27-20, paragraph 10-3, Claims arising "directly or indirectly" from combat activities of the US. Armed Forces are not payable. AR 27-20 defines combat activities as "Activities resulting directly or indirectly from action by the enemy, or by the U.S. Armed Forces engaged in armed conflict, or in immediate preparation for impending armed conflict." Here, an airstrike clearly constitutes combat activity. While unfortunate, this claim is precluded from compensation under the combat exception.

Recommendation: The claim is denied

Dec. 5 2005:

Claimant alleges that on the above date at the above mentioned location, the child was outside playing by their gate and a stray bullet from a U.S. soldier hit their son in the head and killed him. The U.S. soldiers went to the boy's funeral and apologized to the family and took their information to get to them, but never did. The child was nine years old and their only son.

Recommendation: I recommend approving this claim in the amount of \$4,000.

April 15, 2005

Claimant alleges that on or about 24

February 2005, he was riding in a mini-bus with his nine-year-old son on his lap when Coalition Forces fired a round into the bus. The round allegedly hit his son in the head, causing the son's death later on. Xxxxx alleges that some Americans came to the hospital and apologized. He also states that one of the HMMWV's had "32" on the side. Claimant has enclosed an autopsy report.

Allow me to express my sympathy for your loss, however, in accordance with the cited references and after investigating your claim, I find that your claim is not compensable for the following reason: In your claim you failed to provide sufficient evidence that U.S. Forces and not someone else is responsible for your damages.

Recommendation: Accordingly, your claim must be denied.

Incident occurred Jan. 6, 2005 at a bridge near Haifa Street

Claimant alleges that her husband, who was working as a journalist, was walking across the bridge when he was shot and killed by U.S. troops. She has documentation from CA confirming that US. troops were in the area at that time. Also, a medical report is attached stating that the round that killed the victim was a 5.56mm round. The claimant has submitted sufficient evidence.

Recommendation: I recommend approving this claim in the amount of \$2,500.

(She had asked for \$5,000)

April 11, 2005

On 11 April 2005, Claimant's father was allegedly killed by CF forces near the Samarra Museum... Claimant says that his father was deaf and would not have heard danger nearby. The claimant did not personally witness the shooting and relies solely on eyewitnesses. Eye witnesses related that victim was shot by CF forces. The Claimant does not know if his father was shot by CF forces responding to an AIF attack, or whether CF fired directly on his father.

The claimant presented a claim in the amount of \$4,000 on 21 November 2005.

Recommendation: This claim be denied.

Dec. 5, 2004

The issue presented is whether claimant may receive compensation for the death of his father, his mother, his brother and 32 sheep.

In this case, the claimant has lost his entire family and his herd of sheep that provide a means of income. In addition, the claimant suffered gun shot wounds himself.

The claimant states that his family was sleeping when the shots were fired that killed his family. He claims that the family had only one AK-47 that the father carried outside after his wife was shot in the head. The coalition force may have been justified in shooting at another target where the claimant and his family would be collateral damage to that combat operation. However, the ROE require units to have positive

The claimant states that his family was sleeping when the shots were fired that killed his family. He claims that the family had only one AK-47 that the father carried outside after his wife was shot in the head

THE COST OF WAR

Claimant alleges that Coalition Forces fired upon his two sons as they were leaving the market. The claimants sons waived their shirts and their underwear as a sign of peace

identification of target before engaging. In this case, reports indicate that over one hundred rounds were fired that impacted around a flock of sheep and his sleeping family. Accordingly, it appears that the shooting, although not “wrongful”, was conducted “negligently.” It is therefore my opinion that there is sufficient evidence to justify compensation under the FCA.

Recommendation: Claimant be approved in the amount claimed totaling \$11,020.

April 1, 2005

On 11 April 2005, at about 11:30 am, Claimant’s 8 year old sister, xxxx was allegedly killed by CF forces near the Al Khatib Secondary School, Samarra. xxxx says that his sister was playing near the school and was shot by CF. Deceased’s death certificate ... she was killed by gunfire. The claimant did not personally witness the shooting and relies solely on eye witnesses. Eye witnesses related that victim was shot by CF forces by a “random shot.” During the interview, it was impossible to clarify what the claimant meant by a “random shot.” A SIGACTS investigation revealed no activity or incidents in Samarra on that date.

Recommendation: Based upon the investigation by this FCC, it is

reasonable to conclude that the CF activity can be characterized as combat activity. I recommend this claim be denied.

June 17, 2005

Claimant alleges that on the above date at the above mentioned location, his brother xxxxx was traveling in his car with rugs that he was taking to a rug store to sell. He was shot by U.S. soldiers, and the rugs and cash in his possession were never recovered...and his body left there.

Recommendation: I recommend approving this claim in the amount of \$3,000.

April 23, 2006, Samarra

Claimant alleges that Coalition Forces fired upon his two sons as they were leaving the market. The claimants sons waived their shirts and their underwear as a sign of peace. The claimant provided death certificates, legal expert and witness statements to substantiate the claim.

Opinion: There is not enough evidence to prove the claim.

Recommendation: The claim is denied. **CT**

Greg Mitchell is editor of E&P. This article was first published at editorandpublisher.com

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