

INSIDE: THE TRIUMPH OF LUNACY ● NOTES FROM A DIVIDED NATION ● THE HEDONISTS OF POWER ● A LITTLE DISSENT IS TOO MUCH ● **AND MORE**

The ^{ColdType} READER

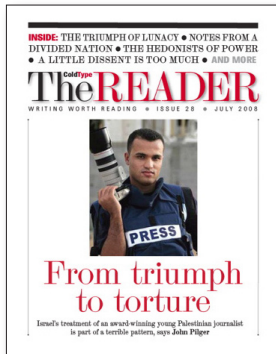
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From triumph to torture

Israel's treatment of award-winning Palestinian journalist
Mohammed Omar is part of a terrible pattern, says **John Pilger**

The ^{ColdType} READER



Editor: Tony Sutton
(editor@coldtype.net)

For a free subscription to The ColdType Reader, e-mail Jools Sutton at jools@coldtype.net (type SUBSCRIBE in the subject line)

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From triumph to torture

Israel's treatment of an award-winning young Palestinian journalist is part of a terrible pattern, says **John Pilger**

Near the end of June, I presented a young Palestinian, Mohammed Omer, with the 2008 Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism. Awarded in memory of the great US war correspondent, the prize goes to journalists who expose establishment propaganda, or “official drivel”, as Gellhorn called it. Mohammed shares the prize of £5,000 with Dahr Jamail. At 24, he is the youngest winner. His citation reads: “Every day, he reports from a war zone, where he is also a prisoner. His homeland, Gaza, is surrounded, starved, attacked, forgotten. He is a profoundly humane witness to one of the great injustices of our time. He is the voice of the voiceless.”

The eldest of eight, Mohammed has seen most of his siblings killed or wounded or maimed. An Israeli bulldozer crushed his home while the family were inside, seriously injuring his mother. And yet, says a former Dutch ambassador, Jan Wijenberg, “he is a moderating voice, urging Palestinian youth not to court hatred but seek peace with Israel”.

Getting Mohammed to London to receive his prize was a major diplomatic operation. Israel has perfidious control over Gaza's borders, and only with a Dutch embassy escort was he allowed out. At the end of June, on his return journey, he

was met at the Allenby Bridge crossing (to Jordan) by a Dutch official, who waited outside the Israeli building, unaware Mohammed had been seized by Shin Bet, Israel's infamous security organisation. Mohammed was told to turn off his mobile and remove the battery. He asked if he could call his embassy escort and was told forcefully he could not. A man stood over his luggage, picking through his documents. “Where's the money?” he demanded. Mohammed produced some US dollars. “Where is the English pound you have?”

“I realised,” said Mohammed, “he was after the award stipend for the Martha Gellhorn prize. I told him I didn't have it with me. ‘You are lying’, he said. I was now surrounded by eight Shin Bet officers, all armed. The man called Avi ordered me to take off my clothes. I had already been through an x-ray machine. I stripped down to my underwear and was told to take off everything. When I refused, Avi put his hand on his gun. I began to cry: ‘Why are you treating me this way? I am a human being.’ He said, ‘This is nothing compared with what you will see now.’ He took his gun out, pressing it to my head and with his full body weight pinning me on my side, he forcibly removed my underwear. He then made me do a concocted sort of dance. Another

I was now surrounded by eight Shin Bet officers, all armed. The man called Avi ordered me to take off my clothes. I had already been through an x-ray machine. I stripped down to my underwear and was told to take off everything”

CROSSING THE LINE

“Another man had his combat boot on my neck, pressing into the hard floor. I lay there for over an hour. The room became a menagerie of pain, sound and terror”

man, who was laughing, said, ‘Why are you bringing perfumes?’ I replied, ‘They are gifts for the people I love’. He said, ‘Oh, do you have love in your culture?’

“As they ridiculed me, they took delight most in mocking letters I had received from readers in England. I had now been without food and water and the toilet for 12 hours, and having been made to stand, my legs buckled. I vomited and passed out. All I remember is one of them gouging, scraping and clawing with his nails at the tender flesh beneath my eyes. He scooped my head and dug his fingers in near the auditory nerves between my head and eardrum. The pain became sharper as he dug in two fingers at a time. Another man had his combat boot on my neck, pressing into the hard floor. I lay there for over an hour. The room became a menagerie of pain, sound and terror.”

Ambulance called

An ambulance was called and told to take Mohammed to a hospital, but only after he had signed a statement indemnifying the Israelis from his suffering in their custody. The Palestinian medic refused, courageously, and said he would contact the Dutch embassy escort. Alarmed, the Israelis let the ambulance go. The Israeli response has been the familiar line that Mohammed was “suspected” of smuggling and “lost his balance” during a “fair” interrogation, Reuters reported. Israeli

human rights groups have documented the routine torture of Palestinians by Shin Bet agents with “beatings, painful binding, back bending, body stretching and prolonged sleep deprivation”.

Amnesty has long reported the widespread use of torture by Israel, whose victims emerge as mere shadows of their former selves. Some never return. Israel is high in an international league table for its murder of journalists, especially Palestinian journalists, who receive barely a fraction of the kind of coverage given to the BBC’s Alan Johnston.

The Dutch government says it is shocked by Mohammed Omer’s treatment. The former ambassador Jan Wijenberg said: “This is by no means an isolated incident, but part of a long-term strategy to demolish Palestinian social, economic and cultural life ... I am aware of the possibility that Mohammed Omer might be murdered by Israeli snipers or bomb attack in the near future.”

While Mohammed was receiving his prize in London, the new Israeli ambassador to Britain, Ron Proser, was publicly complaining that many Britons no longer appreciated the uniqueness of Israel’s democracy. Perhaps they do now. **CT**

*John Pilger’s latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, is now out in paperback. His new movie is **The War on Democracy**.*

*This essay first appeared in the **Guardian newspaper’s Comment Is Free** weblog*

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The triumph of lunacy

Will the US become a more civilized society when Bush and Cheney leave the White House? The signs are not good, writes **Edward S. Herman**

The public in the United States doesn't like what is going on and fully 81 percent feel that the country is moving in the wrong direction. But there doesn't seem to be much the public can do about it. It was widely felt that the 2006 election was a vote against the Iraq war, but the victorious Democrats failed to make any significant moves toward stopping the war or even halting, let alone reversing, Bush's attacks on constitutional government, and they have left the lame duck and discredited Decider in charge with a steady flow of additional funds to escalate the Iraq war.

Even more spectacular, Bush-Cheney seem headed toward a war against Iran, and the Democrats, while making a few chiding remarks, have actually given Bush-Cheney a quasi-legal basis for attacking Iran, with Pelosi removing from an Iraq War-funding bill a clause requiring Bush to obtain congressional sanction before starting a war on Iran, and the Democrats in the Senate voting unanimously for the Kyle-Lieberman bill declaring the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a segment of the Iranian army, a "terrorist organization."

There are many other indications of a possible U.S. attack on Iran in the next few months by the lame duck adminis-

tration – the removal of Admiral William Fallon from head of Central Command and replacement by Bush lap-dog David Petraeus; the recent Petraeus-Crocker stress on Iran's alleged involvement in the Iraq war; the further bolstering of U.S. naval forces in the Persian Gulf; open warnings that military attack is one option under consideration (Ann Scott Tyson, "U.S. Weighing Readiness for Military Action Against Iran," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2008); congressional funding of more "bunker-busting" bombs and extra bombers to carry them – all without serious Democratic Party response or media and "international community" concern and counter-action.

UN chief Ban Ki-Moon is very upset about China's repressive actions in Tibet, but says nothing about the possibility of yet another "supreme international crime" against Iran, the form of action that was the main focus of the UN Charter under which Ki-Moon supposedly operates.

Other difficulties abound. The wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan continue and grow with the United States and NATO determined to impose their version of "stability" on those distant lands. The Israelis continue to expand settlements and mercilessly grind down the Gaza strip population, with unremitting U.S.

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THIS MAD WORLD

Barack Obama has not proposed cuts in the military budget or a scaling down of foreign bases or any major redistribution program and it is evident that he is not prepared to fight hard against the insurance and pharmaceutical lobbies on health care reform

and “international community” support. The Western powers (mainly the United States, Britain, France, and Israel) all work toward improving their nuclear arms and only very selectively support the Non-Proliferation Treaty, accommodating the U.S. moves toward war with Iran; and weapons budgets and arms sales continue to grow.

The economic growth of China and India and the move to ethanol-based fuel have helped push up the price of oil and food, threatening a major food shortage crisis across the globe. Income inequality continues to advance within and between countries under the regime of neoliberalism (i.e., advanced class warfare). No important steps have been taken to meet the challenge of global warming and, in fact, the coal industry and coal-fueled power plants are expanding in China and elsewhere.

Finally, the debt- and speculation-based growth in the United States has produced a financial and economic crisis there and beyond that is not yet resolved, and the failure to add any new regulations to constrain the financial casino market bodes ill for future stability.

Exaggerated hope

It may be argued, however, that there is great hope in the discrediting of the Bush-Cheney administration and its prospective replacement by a Democratic administration in 2009. This hope may be mistaken or at least seriously exaggerated. It fails to recognize that the problems and threats are based on structural facts that the election results won't alter and that are actually discernible in the election process itself. One fact is the power of U.S. militarism, centered in the military-industrial complex (MIC), including the Pentagon, the vast army of contractors (47,000 prime contractors, over 100,000 subcontractors, in one recent estimate), its support base in the rest of the business and financial community, and the

MIC employees – but extending to the closely related pro-Israel lobby, the Christian right, and the right wing and much of the “liberal” media.

Furthermore, the steadily increasing concentration of business, media, income, and wealth has helped normalize a growing inequality and made any “populist” moves difficult to carry out given their unacceptability to the dominant power elite. This centralization of wealth and power has helped further plutocratize the election process, with any competitive candidate up to his or her ears in financial obligation to power elements that want a big military budget and wars and who will oppose any serious reversal of the Bush upward redistribution program.

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Neither is he putting any weight on building up the labor movement as an oppositional base. Recall that Bill Clinton was going to “put people first,” but quickly bowed down to the bond market and then to the “free trade” lobby. He and Gore did literally nothing progressive on the environmental front. Under their rule the prison population soared and so did the stock market bubble (and inequality). When Bush carried out his early attacks on the labor movement – ending restrictions on awarding government contracts to anti-union firms, prohibiting airline industry strikes, limiting use of union dues to support political candidates, etc. – the Democrats did not respond.

The structural obstacles to pro-people change in a plutocracy with a concentrated and anti-populist media are formidable. If Obama gets elected he would have to spend a lot of energy and political capital assuring the establishment (bond

market, major donors, MIC, corporate media) that he is not too progressive.

Major moves to “put people first” would require an awful lot of grass-roots organization and pressure that would be hard to put together after the success in just getting a Democrat elected. It will also have to overcome the drag of the “blue dog” and other conservative elements in the Democratic Party that have long made it difficult for that Party to act with unity and make any progressive advance.

Can the Democrats even win the next presidential election? This is surely far from certain, with the Democrats in a costly primary contest, and John McCain already benefiting from the now institutionalized media bias in favor of Republican and right-wing candidates (see Eric Boehlert, *Lapdogs: How the Press Rolled Over for Bush*, 2006; David Brock and Paul Waldman, *Free Ride: John McCain and the Media*, 2008; FAIR, “Media Hold McCain, Obama, to Different Standards,” Media Advisory, March 14, 2008).

The ability of the Swift Boat Veterans to damage the political prospects of Vietnam War veteran John Kerry in 2004, with crucial media help, while any criticism of George W. Bush’s record as a Vietnam War evader and National Guard deserter was effectively buried by that same media, is frightening testimony to the ability of the right-wing media joint venture to keep government in the hands of the war-and-inequality party. Obama should provide an even better demonization target than John Kerry for the joint venturers.

We have left the world of MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction – and entered the world of beyond MAD, of Bush-Cheney and the five high-level NATO military officers who recently put up a manifesto stressing the need to redeem a first strike nuclear option to prevent nuclear war. Nuclear war has become more practicable, in part, because with the So-

viet Union gone it has become possible to think of using nuclear weapons without the possibility of massive nuclear retaliation. If the United States or Israel uses nuclear arms against Iran, nuclear-weaponless Iran cannot retaliate in kind. There may be further nasty and dangerous repercussions, but perhaps less frightening than a return nuclear strike.

But nuclear warfare has also become more likely because of U.S. militarization, projection of power, actual warfare spread across the globe – under the cover of an alleged “war on terror” – and deliberate fear-mongering.

War against Third World

The “clash of civilizations” is essentially a war of the United States and its allies against the Third World, with 9/11 providing the desired “Pearl Harbor” that justified the new crusade. This has helped reduce moral barriers to barbarism: to mass killing, pain infliction, and devastation on the growing ranks of “enemies.”

Continuous warfare, daily reports of killings and torture, and fear-mongering, have hardened as well as frightened people, making them more easily adjusted to formerly beyond-the-pale modes of killing. The incredible stream of propaganda about an Iranian nuclear weapons threat to countries that actually possess large nuclear weapons arsenals has fed the hysteria and caused even “liberal” hack politicians to proclaim that we must keep “all options” open and that if nuclear-weaponless Iran should some day drop a nuclear bomb on Israel we would “obliterate” Iran – a stupid and gratuitous feeding of the spirit of violence encouraging the resort to nuclear weapons by those that have them.

The termination of the Soviet Union ushered in a new era of U.S. triumphalism and a belief on the part of U.S. elites that they could project power and reshape the world in accord with U.S. interests without major resistance. One

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THIS MAD WORLD

The United States also bullied Russia in its bombing war against Serbia in 1999 and more recently in removing Kosovo from Serbia, against Russia's strong opposition

feature of this perspective was the view that Russia could be ignored as a power with legitimate geopolitical interests – that it would or should follow U.S. dictates or that it could be easily coerced into compliance.

This was supported in the Yeltsin years by the fact that he was compliant, virtually a U.S. agent from within. He was celebrated here as a “reformer” because, with U.S. advice and pressure, he destroyed the good as well as bad in the prior system, shock-therapied Russia into economic and social collapse, sponsored a highly concentrated oligarchic economic system based on theft, eliminated Parliamentary government, and established the basis for a new authoritarianism.

Yeltsin's chosen successor, Vladimir Putin, halted the “reforms,” increased the government's role in the economy, limited somewhat the power of the oligarchs, and gradually abandoned the Yeltsin policy of compliance and subservience to U.S. policy demands.

This resulted in large part because of a series of hostile acts toward Russia which suggested that rather than being regarded as a U.S. “partner,” Russia was on the list of potential “regime change” targets.

These included aggressive U.S. encirclement of Russia with new military bases on Russia's borders, encouragement of “regime change” in Georgia and the Ukraine, and the expansion of NATO into the Baltic states and Eastern Europe, in violation of a pledge to Gorbachev to refrain from any such threatening actions at the time the Soviet Union agreed to allow East Germany to join the West.

Nuclear arsenal

The United States also bullied Russia in its bombing war against Serbia in 1999 and more recently in removing Kosovo from Serbia, against Russia's strong opposition. The United States has also been improving its nuclear arsenal, now spending over \$6 billion a year on reno-

vating and improving its nuclear weaponry (more than the yearly average spent during the Cold War), and has officially incorporated nuclear weapons and nuclear warfare as part of standard war planning operations, providing “credible military options” in dealing with potential targets, with Russia named as one such target in the Pentagon's 2002 Nuclear Posture Review.

It is in this context that the United States has proposed putting anti-missile interceptors in Poland and Czechoslovakia, allegedly as protection against possible nuclear missile strikes by nuclear-weaponless Iran. Vladimir Putin has strongly objected to this plan as posing a national security threat to Russia.

Given the context of hostile U.S. actions, the idiocy of the notion that Iran poses a nuclear missile threat to Poland or Czechoslovakia (or the U.S.) and the fact that such missiles near the Russian border could facilitate a U.S. first-strike on Russia – a country named as a potential target in 2002 – Putin's objections are entirely credible and rational.

But in the age of a triumphant lunacy, Putin is seen as engaged in “shrill posturing” and “diverting attention from his own own thuggery at home” (NYT), although the *Times* does acknowledge that the plans to which Putin objects are a bit misguided and foolish, in good part because the missiles are not yet proven workable.

But it is amusing to see how thoroughly the *New York Times* contributes to this lunacy. For one thing, Putin is now called a “dictator, “who “has so emasculated the democratic institutions that evolved in the 1990s that it is apparent he has little confidence in his people” (“Exit, Russian Democracy,” Nov. 27, 2007). It is true that Russia's democratic institutions are in bad shape, but they devolved into this condition under the “reformer” Yeltsin, to whom the *Times* gave steady accolades, even as he destroyed the conditions for a

real democracy and pushed his majority into poverty. But he did this with policies pleasing to the United States, a counter-revolution from above done without consulting or showing the slightest “confidence in his people” or concern for their welfare. Serve the U.S. and you are a “reformer,” whereas if you fail to cooperate with this country there is a new concern over “democracy.”

Ignoring the threat

The *Times* does not acknowledge that the placement of missiles in Poland and Czechoslovakia constitutes any kind of threat to Russia. The editors state “we don’t buy Moscow’s crocodile tears about how a handful of interceptors pose a threat to Russia’s huge arsenal” (“The Poles Get Cold Feet,” Dec. 30, 2007). The editors of course don’t ask why the United States got so upset at the Russian missiles in Cuba in the early 1960s that could hardly threaten the U.S.’s huge arsenal nor do they ask how the U.S. would respond today to a Russian placement of a “handful of interceptors” in Venezuela. It also never occurs to them that an initial placement of missiles might be enlarged in the future.

The editors also never directly challenge the claim that the missiles in Poland and Czechoslovakia would be aimed

at an Iran threat. This is a triple lunacy as Iran doesn’t have any nuclear weapons and won’t for a long time, if ever; and if it did there would be no reason for Iran to aim them at Poland or Czechoslovakia.

Aiming them at Israel or the United States, except as a desperation defensive action, would be suicidal.

But the *Times* cannot admit this because both the U.S. war-makers and Israel have declared the nuclear-weaponless Iran an existential threat that has no right of self-defense, and a good propaganda organ like the *New York Times* must go along with this demonization and claimed threat.

This calls for not challenging, even supporting, convenient lunacies and, in a great tradition, thereby contributing to the march toward the next U.S.-Israeli aggression. **CT**

Edward S. Herman is Professor Emeritus of Finance at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and has written extensively on economics, political economy and the media. Among his books are Corporate Control Corporate Power, The Real Terror Network, Triumph of the Market, Manufacturing Consent (with Noam Chomsky) and Imperial Alibis (South End Press).

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Exxon rewarded for Valdez spill

Greg Palast has been following the case of the Exxon Valdez for 20 years. He's not surprised by the Supreme Court's new ruling

His company offered the Natives pennies on the dollar. The oil men added a cruel threat: take it or leave it and wait twenty years to get even the pennies. Exxon is immortal – but Natives die

Twenty years after Exxon Valdez slimed over one thousand miles of Alaskan beaches, the company has yet to pay the \$5 billion in punitive damages awarded by the jury. And now they won't have to. In late June the Supreme Court cut Exxon's liability by 90% to half a billion. It's so cheap, it's like a permit to spill.

Exxon knew this would happen. Right after the spill, I was brought to Alaska by the Natives whose Prince William Sound islands, livelihoods, and their food source were contaminated by Exxon crude. My assignment: to investigate oil company frauds that led to the disaster. There were plenty.

But before we brought charges, the Natives hoped to settle with the oil company, to receive just enough compensation to buy some boats and rebuild their island villages to withstand what would be a decade of trying to survive in a polluted ecological death zone.

In San Diego, I met with Exxon's US production chief, Otto Harrison, who said, "Admit it; the oil spill's the best thing to happen" to the Natives.

His company offered the Natives pennies on the dollar. The oil men added a cruel threat: take it or leave it and wait twenty years to get even the pennies. Exxon is immortal – but Natives die.

And they did. A third of the Native fishermen and seal hunters I worked with are dead. Now their families will collect one tenth of their award, two decades too late.

In last month's ruling, Supreme Court Justice David Souter wrote that Exxon's recklessness was "profitless" – so the company shouldn't have to pay punitive damages. Profitless, Mr. Souter? Exxon and its oil shipping partners saved billions – BILLIONS – by operating for sixteen years without the oil spill safety equipment they promised, in writing, under oath and by contract.

The official story is, "Drunken Skipper Hits Reef." But don't believe it, Mr. Souter. Alaska's Native lands and coastline were destroyed by a systematic fraud motivated by profit-crazed penny-pinching. Here's the unreported story, the one you won't get tonight on the Petroleum Broadcast System:

It begins in 1969 when big shots from Humble Oil and ARCO (now known as Exxon and British Petroleum) met with the Chugach Natives, owners of the most valuable parcel of land on the planet: Valdez Port, the only conceivable terminus for a pipeline that would handle a trillion dollars in crude oil.

These Alaskan natives ultimately agreed to sell the Exxon consortium this

astronomically valuable patch of land – for a single dollar. The Natives refused cash. Rather, in 1969, they asked only that the oil companies promise to protect their Prince William Sound fishing and seal hunting grounds from oil.

In 1971, Exxon and partners agreed to place the Natives' specific list of safeguards into federal law. These commitment to safety reassured enough Congressmen for the oil group to win, by one vote, the right to ship oil from Valdez.

The oil companies repeated their promises under oath to the US Congress.

The spill disaster was the result of Exxon and partners breaking every one of those promises – cynically, systematically, disastrously, in the 15 years leading up to the spill.

Drunken skipper?

Forget the drunken skipper fable. As for Captain Joe Hazelwood, he was below decks, sleeping off his bender. At the helm, the third mate would never have collided with Bligh Reef had he looked at his Raycas radar. But the radar was not turned on. In fact, the tanker's radar was left broken and disabled for more than a year before the disaster, and Exxon management knew it. It was just too expensive to fix and operate.

For the Chugach, this discovery was poignantly ironic. On their list of safety demands in return for Valdez was "state-of-the-art" on-ship radar.

We discovered more, but because of the labyrinthine ways of litigation, little became public, especially about the reckless acts of the industry consortium, Alyeska, which controls the Alaska Pipeline.

Several smaller oil spills before the Exxon Valdez could have warned of a system breakdown. But a former Senior Lab Technician with Alyeska, Erlene Blake, told our investigators that management routinely ordered her to toss out test samples of water showing evidence of spilled oil. She was ordered to

refill the test tubes with a bucket of clean sea water called, "The Miracle Barrel."

In a secret meeting in April 1988, Alyeska Vice-President T.L. Polasek confidentially warned the oil group executives that, because Alyeska had never purchased promised safety equipment, it was simply "not possible" to contain an oil spill past the Valdez Narrows -- exactly where the Exxon Valdez ran aground 10 months later.

The Natives demanded (and law requires) that the shippers maintain round-the-clock oil spill response teams. Alyeska hired the Natives, especially qualified by their generations-old knowledge of the Sound, for this emergency work. They trained to drop from helicopters into the water with special equipment to contain an oil slick at a moment's notice. But in 1979, quietly, Alyeska fired them all. To deflect inquisitive state inspectors, the oil consortium created sham teams, listing names of oil terminal workers who had not the foggiest idea how to use spill equipment which, in any event, was missing, broken or existed only on paper.

In 1989, when the oil poured from the tanker, there was no Native response team, only chaos.

Now, twenty years after the oil washed over the Chugach beaches, you can kick over a rock and it will smell like an old gas station.

The cover story of the Drunken Captain serves the oil industry well. It falsely presents America's greatest environmental disaster as a tale of human frailty, a one-time accident. But broken radar, missing equipment, phantom spill teams, faked tests -- the profit-driven disregard of the law – made the spill an inevitability, not an accident.

Yet Big Oil tells us, as they plead to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, as Senator John McCain calls for drilling off the shores of the Lower 48, it can't happen again.

They promise.

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Greg Palast is a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow for Investigative Reporting at the Nation Institute, New York. Read and view his investigations for BBC Television at <http://www.GregPalast.com>. An earlier version of this report appeared in the Chicago Tribune

CT

The empire: a status report

William Blum reports on Washington's continuing quest for world dominance

If they're planning on a new "thousand-year Reich", let's hope that their fate is no better than the original, which lasted 12 years

There are a number of expressions and slogans associated with the Nazi regime in Germany which have become commonly known in English.

"Sieg Heil!" – Victory Hail!

"Arbeit macht frei" – Work will make you free.

"Denn heute gehört uns Deutschland und morgen die ganze Welt" – Today Germany, tomorrow the world

But none perhaps is better known than "Deutschland über alles" – Germany above all.

Thus I was taken aback when I happened to come across the website of the United States Air Force – www.airforce.com/ – and saw on its first page a heading "Above all". Lest you think that this refers simply and innocently to planes high up in the air, this page links to another – www.airforce.com/achanging-world/ – where "Above all" is repeated even more prominently, with links to sites for "Air Dominance", "Space Dominance", and "Cyber Dominance", each of which in turn repeats "Above all". These guys don't kid around. They're not your father's imperialist war mongers. If they're planning on a new "thousand-year Reich", let's hope that their fate is no better than the original, which lasted 12 years.

The events of recent years indicate that the world is wakening up to and becoming less intimidated by Washington's overarching ambition for world dominance. Latin America is increasingly attempting to escape the empire's clutches. Leaders keenly aware of how US imperialism works and determined to keep it out of their own country are in power in Venezuela, Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, and perhaps the latest addition, Paraguay.

And now Africa has turned down Washington's offer to be part of the imperial family. African governments have refused to host Africom, the US Africa Command. The *Washington Post* reported that "worry swept the continent that the United States planned major new military installations in Africa", and despite the promise of new development and security partnerships, many Africans concluded that Africom was primarily an extension of US counterterrorism policy, intended to keep an eye on Africa's large Muslim population.

The United States "equates terrorism with Islam," said a senior Kenyan diplomat, and few African governments wanted to be seen as inviting US surveillance on their own people. [note from your editor: It would be more instructive

to equate anti-American terrorism with American foreign policy, including building military bases in other people's countries.]

When Bush visited Africa in February, he was told by the Ghanaian president: "You're not going to build any bases in Ghana." US-funded aid groups protested plans to expand the American military's role in economic development in Africa, sharply objecting to working alongside US troops. Said an Africom officer: "[Africom] was seen as a massive infusion of military might onto a continent that was quite proud of having removed foreign powers from its soil." [1]

There's also the oil factor. The US imports more oil from African nations than from Saudi Arabia, and the continent has huge unexplored areas. This undoubtedly is a major motivation behind Washington's desire for an expanded military presence in the region.

The United States is not about to take Africa's rejection of Africom as the last word; indeed, some of the tough rhetoric by African officials may be for public consumption, for the US already has somewhat of a military presence on the continent. It will be interesting to observe the ongoing tug of war between Washington and African nationalists/anti-imperialists over expansion of the American presence.

Democracy American style. You gotta problem wit dat?

Here's White House spokeswoman Dana Perino at a recent press briefing:

Reporter: The American people are being asked to die and pay for this, and you're saying that they have no say in this war?

Perino: I didn't say that ... this President was elected ...

Reporter: Well, what it amounts to is you saying we have no input at all.

Perino: You had input. The American people have input every four years, and

that's the way our system is set up. [2]

In 1941, Edward Dowling, editor and priest, commented: "The two greatest obstacles to democracy in the United States are, first, the widespread delusion among the poor that we have a democracy, and second, the chronic terror among the rich, lest we get it."

Can we look forward to Perino's memoir after she leaves the White House in which, like her predecessor Scott McClellan recently, she confesses that she was part of a "permanent campaign" mode to deceive the American public? I'm prepared to welcome her into the fold as I have McClellan. I have a soft spot in my heart for political late bloomers. I used to work for the State Department when I was a good, loyal anti-communist.

Washington's grand and noble new ally in the Free World

Scott McClellan has been criticized for not expressing his reservations about Bush administration policies while still at the White House. This would have indeed taken a measure of courage few people have, and likely meant his job and career suicide.

I'm reminded of Carla Del Ponte, the Swiss diplomat who in 1999 became Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, located in The Hague, Netherlands. In accordance with her official duties, she looked into possible war crimes of all the participants in the conflicts of the 1990s surrounding the breakup of Yugoslavia and the NATO (read the United States) 78-day bombing of Serbia and its province of Kosovo, where ethnic Albanians were trying to secede.

In late December 1999, in an interview with the *Observer* of London, Del Ponte was asked if she was prepared to press criminal charges against NATO personnel (and not just against the former Yugoslav republics). She replied: "If I am not willing to do that, I am not in the right place.

The US imports more oil from African nations than from Saudi Arabia, and the continent has huge unexplored areas. This undoubtedly is a major motivation behind Washington's desire for an expanded military presence in the region

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

The KLA remained on the terrorist list until the US decided to make them an ally, in some measure due to the existence of a major American military base in Kosovo, Camp Bondsteel

I must give up my mission.”

The Tribunal then announced that it had completed a study of possible NATO crimes, declaring: “It is very important for this tribunal to assert its authority over any and all authorities to the armed conflict within the former Yugoslavia.”

Was this a sign from heaven that the new millennium (2000 was but a week away) was going to be one of more equal international justice? Could this really be?

No, it couldn't. From official quarters, military and civilian, of the United States and Canada, came disbelief, shock, anger, denials ... “appalling” ... “unjustified”. Del Ponte got the message. Her office quickly issued a statement: “NATO is not under investigation by the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. There is no formal inquiry into the actions of NATO during the conflict in Kosovo.”[3]

Del Ponte remained in her position until the end of 2007, leaving to become the Swiss ambassador to Argentina; at the same time writing a book about her time with the Tribunal – *The Hunt: Me and War Criminals*, published three months ago but available at the moment only in Italian.

It hasn't been much reported yet what del Ponte has said about NATO, but the book has already created a scandal in Europe, for in it she reveals how the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) abducted hundreds of Serbs in 1999, and took them to Kosovo's fellow Muslims in Albania where they were killed, their kidneys and other body parts then removed and sold for transplant in other countries.

The KLA for years has been engaging in other equally charming activities, such as heavy trafficking in drugs, trafficking in women, various acts of terrorism, and carrying out ethnic cleansing of Serbs who have had the bad fortune to be in Kosovo because it's long been their home. Between 1998 and 2002, the KLA

appeared at times on the State Department terrorism list; at first because of its tactic of targeting innocent Serb civilians in order to provoke retaliation from Serbian troops; later because Mujahadeen mercenaries from various Islamic countries, including some tied to al Qaeda, were fighting alongside the KLA, as they were in Bosnia with the Bosnian Muslims during the 1990s Yugoslav civil wars.[4]

The KLA remained on the terrorist list until the US decided to make them an ally, in some measure due to the existence of a major American military base in Kosovo, Camp Bondsteel. (It's remarkable, is it not, how these bases pop up all around the world?)

In November 2005, following a visit there, Alvaro Gil-Robles, the human rights envoy of the Council of Europe, described the camp as a “smaller version of Guantanamo”, referring to the detainees there at the time from Washington's various wars, including the so-called War on Terror.[5]

On February 17 of this year, in a move of highly questionable international legality, the KLA declared the independence of Kosovo from Serbia. The next day the United States recognized this new “nation”, thus affirming the unilateral declaration of independence of a part of another country's territory.

The new country has as its prime minister a gentleman named Hashim Thaci, described in Del Ponte's book as the brain behind the abductions of Serbs and the sale of their organs.

The new gangster state of Kosovo is supported by Washington and other Western powers who can't forgive Serbia-Yugoslavia-Milosevic – “the last communists of Europe” – for not wanting to wholeheartedly embrace the NATO/US/European Union triumvirate, which recognizes no higher power, United Nations or other. The independent state of Kosovo is regarded as reliably pro-west, a state that will serve as a militarized out-

post for the triumvirate, which is intent on further encircling Russia and pushing it out of Europe.

In her book, Del Ponte asserts that there was sufficient evidence for prosecution of Kosovo Albanians involved in war crimes, but the investigation “was nipped in the bud” focusing instead on “the crimes committed by Serbia.” She claims that she could do nothing because it was next to impossible to collect evidence in Kosovo, which was swarming with criminals, in and out of the government. Witnesses were intimidated, and even judges in The Hague were afraid of the Kosovo Albanians.

In April, the Swiss Foreign Department issued a statement that Del Ponte’s book “contains statements which are impermissible for a representative of the government of Switzerland”, ordered her to return to her ambassadorial post in Argentina, and prohibited any further appearances promoting her book. The Swiss have officially recognized the independence of Kosovo and established an embassy in the country. Kosovo appears likely to remain a highly controversial issue in Europe and Washington for some time to come.[6]

Reason number 3,468 to yearn for the lifting of the capitalist weight from our souls

My phone company, Verizon, recently raised the monthly charge for my international call plan by 30 percent. I phoned them to find out the reason for this and was told that their competitors had raised their charge for the international plan and so Verizon was doing the same. “To stay competitive”, the earnest young man told me.

I thought I must be misunderstanding him. We’ve all been raised to believe that one of the beauties of capitalism is that it provides a competitive environment which induces businesses to lower their rates so as to lure away customers

from their competitors. In the end, the consumer benefits from lower prices. And this makes sense, at least within the capitalist framework. (Although there have of course been numerous cases of large companies lowering prices to force a small company – which initiated the price cuts – out of business, after which the large companies raise their prices back up.) But now? Now we’re told that competition leads to price increases. What, pray tell, is there left of the system for us to believe in?

Supply and demand? Like in Burma, following the recent devastating cyclone? Prices for food and other essentials have risen significantly since the disaster. As they should, according to the revered and beloved law of supply and demand, inasmuch as things are obviously in short supply in Burma and people’s needs are plainly much greater than usual. What could make more sense under circumstances of human desperation than to raise prices?

Yet, though questioning the law of supply and demand is normally regarded in the same light as being skeptical of the law of gravity, I have to do so, and refer to things I’ve expressed before: The price of gasoline in the United States has been increasing on a regular basis for a rather long time now, but there’s no shortage of supply.

There are no lines of cars waiting hours at gas stations trying to fill up before the pumps run dry. And there’s been a considerable fall in demand as less-than-rich drivers cut back on car use. It does not require total cynicism to wonder whether the law of supply and demand has been repealed.

Or can it be that what is known as “supply and demand” is not really any kind of immutable “law”, but rather (choke, gasp) “corporate policies”?

The oil companies are currently spending big bucks to convince the American public that the super-high gasoline prices

It does not require total cynicism to wonder whether the law of supply and demand has been repealed

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

The oil companies are perfectly free to very significantly lower prices without anything that you or I would call financial suffering. But they don't do it. So what's being misunderstood by the public which obliges the companies to spend millions on advertisements? Money which could go toward price reductions

are not the companies' fault. "The industry," reported the *Washington Post*, "is trying to convince voters – who, in turn, will make the case to their members of Congress – that rising energy prices are not the producers' fault and that government efforts to punish the industry, especially with higher taxes, would only make pricing problems worse." [7]

Do the oil companies think they're being misunderstood? The next time you run into a friendly oil company executive ask him this: "If you lowered prices to what they were two years ago, would consumers stage protests outside your headquarters? Would the FBI raid your offices? Would your breathtakingly obscenely high profits drop into the red? Could you still maintain your decadent millionaire lifestyle?"

The oil companies are perfectly free to very significantly lower prices without anything that you or I would call financial suffering. But they don't do it. So what's being misunderstood by the public which obliges the companies to spend millions on advertisements? Money which could go toward price reductions.

Oil company executives at least produce a useful product compared to people in the hedge funds business. What are hedge funds, you ask? They're private, largely unregulated pools of capital whose managers can buy or sell any kind of assets. The income of the fund's executives – often in the tens or hundreds of millions of dollars, sometimes even a billion – is taxed as capital gains, a much lower tax rate than if it were taxed as regular earnings.

One can say that hedge funds are simply pure speculation carried to absurdity; typical of the new American Dream: getting rich through speculation and inheritance instead of through skill, enterprise, and filling a human social need.

Here is Daniel Strachman, a former hedge fund consultant and author of *The Fundamentals of Hedge Fund Man-*

agement. He's skeptical of raising taxes on hedge fund managers, saying they should be rewarded for taking huge risks. [So do firefighters, police officers, and bank robbers of course.] Most managers have their own money in their funds, he declares, and suffer massive losses when their investments go bad. "It's clear somebody has to win and somebody has to lose", says Strachman. "It's not pretty at all because people say, 'Oh my God. Look how much money these guys are making while people are losing their homes and are complaining about the cost of eggs and sugar.' But so what? We don't live in a society that is pretty all the time. That's why it's capitalism." [8] **CT**

William Blum is the author of: Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2; Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower; West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir; Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire

NOTES

[1] *Washington Post*, June 1, 2008, p.18

[2] White House press briefing, March 20, 2008

[3] *The Observer* (London), December 26, 1999; *Washington Times*, December 30 and 31, 1999; *New York Times*, December 30, 1999

[4] There are numerous articles in the world press of the past 20 years about the KLA's inordinate thuggery; Google "KLA" and one or more of the key words, such as drugs, prostitution, ethnic cleansing, transplants, etc.

[5] <http://wikipedia.org/>, under "Camp Bondsteel"

[6] Del Ponte's book and the turmoil it's produced have been largely ignored in the US media, but if one does a Google on her name and the book, one will find many reports from Europe.

[7] *Washington Post*, May 9, 2008, p.D1

[8] *Washington Post*, April 17, 2008, p.D1

Notes from a divided nation

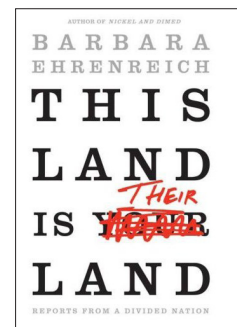
The introduction to *This Land Is Their Land: Notes From A Divided Nation*, a new book by **Barbara Ehrenreich**

For a year or so at the beginning of the millennium, Americans were swept up in a spasm of unity. We hadn't had an enemy scary enough to pull us together since the USSR deconstructed in 1991, and now here was one capable of bringing down the World Trade Center with box cutters, a group that had declared they wanted every one of us dead, from the janitors in our buildings to the CEOs. Transfixed by the jihadists, we wrapped ourselves in flags – flag sweaters, T-shirts, decals, lapel pins, even underwear and bathing suits. “United We Stand,” proclaimed the bumper stickers, and “These Colors Don't Run.”

To be sure, this unity was as thin as a starlet after a sojourn at a spa. How were we to express it, for example, other than through our sartorial decisions? We pondered the ubiquitous instruction to “report all suspicious persons and activities” and that even more enigmatic command from the New York mass transit system: “See something, say something.” The president advised us to carry on shopping, which we did to the best of our abilities, remaining in a state of dazed puzzlement while the ~~we~~ stripped off our shoes and our belts and the government ripped away habeas corpus and all the elementary ingredients of privacy.

But whatever resonated with us about the idea of a “homeland” and “one nation, indivisible” was being quietly undercut by a force more powerful than terrorism, more divisive than treason. In a process that had begun in the 1980s and suddenly accelerated in the early 2000s, the ground was shifting under our feet, recarving the American landscape. The peaks of great wealth grew higher, rising up beyond the clouds, while the valleys of poverty sank lower into perpetual shadow. The once broad plateau of the middle class eroded away into a narrow ledge, with the white-knuckled occupants holding on for dear life.

It wasn't just a “shift,” of course, governed by impersonal geological forces. The rude hand of human intervention could be felt in 2001, when the government gave the airlines a \$20 billion post-9/11 bail-out, with nothing for the ninety thousand freshly laid-off airline employees. In another deft upward redistribution of wealth, the administration cut taxes for the wealthiest Americans while cutting back on services and programs, such as financial aid, for everyone else. We had never had a gang in Washington as noisily committed to “Christian values,” and yet they had managed to stand core biblical teachings on their head.



THIS LAND IS THEIR LAND: NOTES FROM A DIVIDED NATION

Barbara Ehrenreich
Metropolitan Books
\$24

BOOK EXCERPT

The greatest capitalist innovations of this past decade have been in the realm of squeezing money out of those who have little to spare: taking away workers' pensions and benefits to swell profits, offering easy credit on dubious terms, raising insurance premiums and refusing to insure those who might ever make a claim, downsizing workforces to boost share prices, even falsifying time records to avoid paying overtime

The results were glaringly visible by 2004, when the Democratic vice presidential candidate announced there were now “two Americas.” This was almost certainly an undercount. We had divided into two markets – upscale and downscale, Sears and Saks – two decades earlier, and now these were further subdividing. The middle class, battered by wave after wave of outsourcings and layoffs, scrambled to meet the ever-rising costs of health care, fuel, and college education. The traditional working class, already savaged by deindustrialization, took the low-paying service jobs that were left, trading their hard hats for mops and trays. They crowded grown children and grandchildren into their homes, which they refinanced at usurious rates. They faced speedups at work and cutbacks in pay. When their monthly health insurance premiums exceeded the mortgage or rent, they abandoned the insurance and fell back on Advil.

As for the rich, mere millionaires and the old-money sorts who favor weather-beaten summer homes in Nantucket barely qualified anymore. The upper class split into the merely affluent, who shop at Williams-Sonoma, and the über-rich, who had others do their shopping for them, as well as their child raising, bill paying, servant supervising, and party throwing. At the pinnacles of the wealth scale, extravagance reigned on a scale not seen since the late Roman Empire. Freshly fattened CEOs, hedge fund operators, and financiers hired interior decorators for their private jets, slugged back \$10,000 martinis at the Algonquin Hotel in Manhattan, and, in one case, staged a \$2 million birthday party in Sardinia featuring an ice statue of David urinating vodka.

There was a connection, as most people suspected, between the massive buildup of wealth among the few and the anxiety and desperation of the many. The money that fueled the explosion of gluttony at

the top had to come from somewhere or, more specifically, from someone. Since no domestic oil deposits had been discovered, no new seams of uranium or gold, and since the war in Iraq enriched only the military contractors and suppliers, it had to have come from other Americans. In fact, the greatest capitalist innovations of this past decade have been in the realm of squeezing money out of those who have little to spare: taking away workers' pensions and benefits to swell profits, offering easy credit on dubious terms, raising insurance premiums and refusing to insure those who might ever make a claim, downsizing workforces to boost share prices, even falsifying time records to avoid paying overtime.

Prosperity, in America, had not always been a zero-sum game. Early twentieth-century capitalists – who were certainly no saints – envisioned a prosperous people generating profits for the upper class by buying houses and cars and washing machines. But somewhere along the line, the ethos changed from we're all in this together to get what you can while the getting is good. Let the environment decay, the infrastructure crumble, the public hospitals close, the schools get by on bake sales, the workers drop from exhaustion – who cares? Raise the premiums, reduce the wages, add new mystery fees to each bill, and let the devil take the hindmost. Only when the poor suckers at the bottom stopped buying and defaulted on their mortgages did anyone notice them.

And where were the rest of us during this orgy of accumulation at the top? What were we thinking as the “invisible hand” of the market reached into our pockets for our wallets? The truth is that most of us were too focused on the tasks at hand to pay much attention to what was going on with the neighbors. We were paying the bills, holding on to the job, occasionally making contact with the children. And when we did take a moment to tune into the public discourse,

we heard very little that addressed our frustration and pain.

The war with Iraq, for starters, which had to be one of the greatest non sequiturs in military history. Attacked by a gang composed largely of Islamic militants from Saudi Arabia, the United States countered by invading an unrelated country, and one of the most secular in the Middle East at that. Briefly fascinated by the toppling of statues and flattening of towns, we rallied to “support our troops,” although no one could figure out what we were supporting them to do. If the war had been launched as a distraction from the corporate scandals of 2002, as one theory goes, it soon became something we needed distraction from. Five years later, and after the hideous revelations of Abu Ghraib, we’ve spent \$505 billion, lost four thousand American lives, and achieved the status of a pariah among nations.

Issues more appropriate to a middle school biology or sex ed class also loomed large. Stem cells, for example: whole political careers were based on the defense of these wee entities and their slightly larger cousins the embryos. Insentient forms of life, such as a woman in a vegetative state, excited loud indignation, while the intact and living received barely a nod. In 2005, top Republicans rushed to the bedside of Terri Schiavo, bypassing the thousands of other ailing Floridians hit by Medicaid cuts. Gay marriage was another unlikely issue seemingly designed to distract us from the ongoing economic looting. How one person’s marriage could threaten another’s is a mystery to me, but whole elections were tipped in favor of the party of wealth, for no other purpose than to spare the public from the spectacle of same-sex embraces at the altar. As for the unmarried of any sexual orientation, abstinence was strongly recommended, along with prayer and cold showers.

Illegal immigrants are our latest dis-

traction, vilified as if they had come to run drugs and collect welfare rather than mow lawns, clean offices, pack meat, and process poultry. There is no welfare anymore, of course, and that may be what makes the immigrants such an appealing target. Twenty years ago, right-wing demagogues had welfare recipients to kick around as a stand-in for the hated poor; today, immigrant workers have been pressed into playing the scapegoat role. The strategy is the same: to peel off some segment of the poorer classes, label them as enemies, and try to whip up rage that might have been directed at the economic overclass. There may be reasonable arguments for limiting immigration, but it wasn’t a Mexican who took away your pension or sold you on a dodgy mortgage.

Maybe, too, our critical faculties were dimmed by the habit, endemic in the early 2000s, of magical thinking. The biggest self-help best seller of the last year tells you how you can have anything you want, simply by willing it, and the fiction side of the bookstore is ruled by a young magician in training. Girls are forsaking feminism for a princess fantasy that culminates in weddings lavish enough to bankrupt a couple before they can even take out a car loan. Karl Rove derided the press for its membership in the “reality-based community,” and the fastest-growing brand of religion is of the magical “name it and claim it” variety, in which the deity exists only to meet one’s immediate, self-identified needs. It would be shortsighted to whine about rising debts and falling incomes when, with a little spiritual effort, the miraculous could happen to you.

How many “wake-up calls” do we need, people – how many broken levees, drowned cities, depleted food pantries, people dead for lack of ordinary health care? We approach the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century in a bleak landscape cluttered with boarded-up

Twenty years ago, right-wing demagogues had welfare recipients to kick around as a stand-in for the hated poor; today, immigrant workers have been pressed into playing the scapegoat role

BOOK EXCERPT

The looting of America has gone on too long, and the average American is too maxed out, overworked, and overspent to have anything left to take

homes and littered with broken dreams. The presidential candidates talk about “change,” but don’t bother to articulate what kind of change. Why don’t we dare say it? The looting of America has gone on too long, and the average American is too maxed out, overworked, and overspent to have anything left to take. We’ll need a new deal, a new distribution of power and wealth, if we want to restore the beautiful idea that was “America.”

We could let the nation continue to fall apart, of course – dividing ever more clearly into the gated communities on the one hand and trailer parks and tenements on the other – until we eventually become one of those areas of the world prefixed by the mournful word former.

But I like to think we could find in our hearts some true ground for unity, some awareness of a common condition and collective aspiration. Maybe we could find it in an effort to restore America’s lost glory – the beauty of our land before all the fences and sprawl, the respect

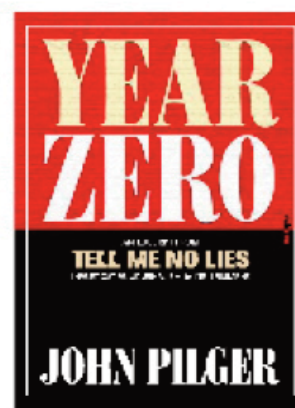
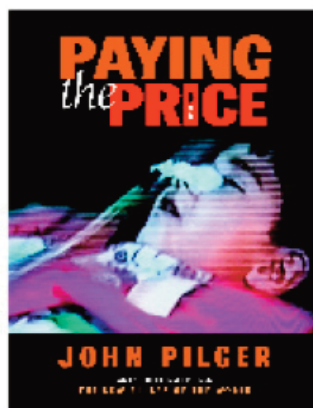
we once enjoyed from people around the world.

Or maybe we need to find it in the common threats we face, not only from the human enemies that our foreign policy has been breeding so prolifically but from the global challenge of climate change and shrinking supplies of water and oil. And maybe, someday, we would even regain the confidence to extend that sense of unity and connectedness to all of our fellow human beings, wherever they may reside on the planet. **CT**

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*Barbara Ehrenreich is the author of 14 books, including the bestsellers **Nickel and Dimed**, and **Bait and Switch**.*

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A freedom fighter comes to dinner

Trevor Grundy on a book that makes an unsuccessful attempt to answer difficult questions about a complicated man

Until recently, historians and journalists have been disinclined to look deeply into the private circumstances and individual psychologies of the African leaders who replaced white rulers in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. In our Manichean enthusiasm for democracy, it was considered neither correct nor constructive to examine too closely what lay behind the public utterances and dramatic showmanship of men like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, Thabo Mbeki, even Nelson Mandela. Until now, anything that damaged Africa's image was seen in liberal media circles as an attempt to boost apartheid.

Now, with white rule in Africa out of the way, the Rhodesia-born South Africa residing author and journalist Heidi Holland has opened the window and, with the help of three psychologists (two white, one black) let in some fresh air and clear bright light on a man we are unable to get enough of, 84-year old Robert Gabriel Mugabe.

We all know where he's going: but where did he come from? That's the question.

With Wordsworth's dictum, 'the child is father of the man' clearly in her mind, Ms Holland begins with a little help from her intriguing subject's former friends.

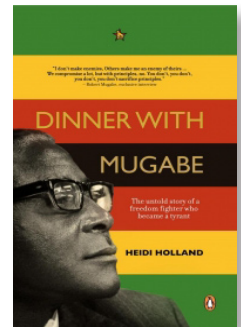
In 1934, it can't have been much fun being the 10-year-old Robert Mugabe. His father Gabriel was a carpenter who went to

Bulawayo looking for work and who never returned to the impoverished Mugabe family at Kutama in Mashonaland, close to the famous Jesuit Mission Station where young Robert (and many of the men who went on to lead Zimbabwe at Independence in 1980) were educated.

It was also the year that Robert's elder (and popular with village girls) brother Michael was found dead, poisoned by something he ate, or someone jealous of him. In her despair, Bona Mugabe, a woman who would have made a better nun than mum – told tiny Bob that not only was he the new head of the family but also a child sent to her by God, who would one day become a great Catholic priest, perhaps even a cardinal. Perhaps even the Pope.

Intellectually furious, the teenage Robert locked himself into the private world of books and religion and attracted the attention of Jesuits who saw him as one of them. A child of "unusual gravitas," said Father Jerome O'Hea SJ, a wealthy priest who took an interest in his young protégé's education and became (say Ms Holland's psychologists) Mugabe's surrogate father.

Sadly for Zimbabwe (perhaps fortunately for the Catholic Church) Robert Mugabe did not go on to become a priest. Instead, after meeting an attractive teacher in Nkrumah's Ghana he returned home to introduce Sally to his mother.



DINNER WITH MUGABE
Heidi Holland
Penguin Books
2008 pp 250 £17.99

BOOK REVIEW

It's one of the strangest interviews I've read in my career as a journalist with some of the author's questions, put to him during a 2½ hours interview at State House, bordering on inanity

Trevor Grundy worked as a reporter for *Time* magazine, *Deutsche Welle*, *SABC*, *Beeld*, *The Scotsman*, and *Radio France Internationale* in Zimbabwe from 1977 until 1996. He is co-author with Bernard Miller of *The Farmer at War* (1979 *Modern Farming Publications, Zimbabwe*.) Reproduced with the permission of *The Herald, Glasgow* © 2008 *Herald & Times Group*

In 1960, he joined the African nationalists fighting against a still fairly “liberal” Rhodesian government and went on to become (after a 10-year imprisonment and the tragic death of his son in Ghana – he was not allowed to attend the funeral) in 1975, a freedom fighter based in Mozambique.

That was the year that Ms Holland – through a Rhodesian lawyer – had her very brief encounter with Mugabe which provides the title for this book. It was the first time she had cooked a meal for a black man. The following day, Mugabe telephoned her and thanked her. Ms Holland – daughter of stalwart supporters of Ian Smith and white rule in Rhodesia – was bowled over. Wide eyed and blinking she asks: “What happened to the man who was kind enough to phone a young mother and inquire about her child after a brief dinner in 1975?”

Unity Mitford and Diana Mosley used to ask questions like that.

Ms Holland either knows next to nothing – or cares not to tell – about the devastating impact the Cold War split between China and the Soviet Union had on relations between Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and its military wing ZIPRA and the leaderless (in 1975) Zimbabwe African National Union and its military wing, ZANLA.

Upon his arrival in Mozambique, President Samora Machel put Mugabe under house arrest for close on a year. Mugabe wrote to James Chikerema (then the break-away leader of FROLIZI in Lusaka) saying he was so pleased that Chikerema had made contact with him.

Years later, Chikerema told me in an interview that Samora Machel asked leading nationalists – including himself – if Mugabe was a “Smith agent.” Machel disliked Mugabe intensely, far preferring the more down to earth guerrilla leader Josiah Tongogara.

Interviews with men who lived alongside Mugabe in Mozambique would have enlivened Holland's book tremendously and added value to her publisher's claim on the

cover that *Dinner with Mugabe* “is the “untold story” of Mugabe's long walk from his days at Kutama to where he has now set up a permanent residence with his ghastly, shopaholic wife – State House, Harare.

With great effort and admirable determination, Ms Holland turns towards some of Mugabe's erstwhile fans and followers for an answer – to his surviving brother: to Denis Norman, Mugabe's first Minister for Agriculture who now lives in the UK: to Mary, widow of Lord Soames (Britain's last Governor in Rhodesia): the rather cranky head of the Jesuits in today's Zimbabwe, half a dozen or so rather nauseating former secret service agents for Smith and Mugabe) and to the great historian and writer Lawrence Vambe who was once a close friend, supporter and Mugabe admirer. They went to school together, Sadly, he lives in England miles from his beloved homeland.

This is a book worth reading despite its many shortcomings. Ms Holland experienced nothing of political or ordinary life in Zimbabwe from 1982 (she tells us she left the country just ahead of Mugabe's secret police) until she returned to Harare last November when she waited weeks in a local hotel for an interview with the Man Himself – it's one of the strangest interviews I've read in my career as a journalist with some of the author's questions, put to him during a 2½ hours interview at State House, bordering on inanity. Ms Holland is also limited by the fact she speaks not a word of either Shona or Sindebele, Zimbabwe's two main local languages.

Dinner with Mugabe is a brave but deeply flawed attempt to answer difficult questions about a complicated man. Yet it is still a thought-provoking work that should engage the mind of anyone with a serious interest in post-colonial Southern Africa. But its claim to tell the “untold story of a freedom fighter who became a tyrant” is ludicrously ambitious, even misleading. This is a piece in a jigsaw puzzle, a part worth having – essential even – but little more than that.

CT

Mind-forged manacles

In Britain, crime is down, convictions are down, but the prisons are bursting. Why?, asks **George Monbiot**

Which of these countries has the most prisoners per head of population? Sudan, Syria, China, Burma, Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe or England and Wales? We win, or rather lose: I have ranked these countries in reverse order. On this measure, England and Wales have a more punitive judicial system than most of the world's dictatorships.

In the last week of June, the government released new figures for the prison population. It broke all records, yet again. It has risen by 38% since Labour came to power, and now stands at 83,181. What does the government intend to do about it? Lock more people up. It is building enough new cells to jail 96,000 people by 2014.

At the beginning of June it laid out its plans for Titan prisons: vast broiler units, which will each house 2,500 people. But they'll be only just big enough: the government expects the number of cons to rise to 95,600 in six years.

As ever, Britain appears to be chasing the United States. In both absolute and relative terms, the USA's prison population is the highest on earth: one percent of its adult population is behind bars. This is five times our preposterous rate and six times Turkey's. It is over twice the rate of the nearest contender, South Af-

rica. If you count the people under community supervision or on probation, the total rises to over 7 million, or 3.1% of the adult population. Black men who failed to complete high school in the US have a 60% chance of ending up in jail. (I feel I need to say that again: 60% of unqualified black men go to prison. It's beginning to look as if the state has stopped imprisoning individuals and started locking up a social class. Is this what we aspire to?)

To judge by the remonstrations of the tabloids, the answer is yes. But why? And why, in the United Kingdom, is imprisonment still rising? It's not because of rising crime.

Falling crime rate

Last year crimes recorded by the police fell by 2%, while the most serious violent offences fell by 9%. Nor does it reflect the conviction rate. That fell by 4% in 2006 (we don't yet have last year's figures). Stranger still, it is not connected to the rate of imprisonment either, which fell by 9% between 2004 and 2006.

The prison population is rising for one reason: people are being put away for longer. Between 1997 and 2004, the average sentence rose from 15.7 months to 16.1. That tells only half the story: the actual time served rose as well, as a result of new laws the government introduced in

It's beginning to look as if the state has stopped imprisoning individuals and started locking up a social class. Is this what we aspire to?

PRISON NATION

When people are locked up, they can't acquire the skills and social contacts they need to get on outside. Employers are reluctant to take them on when they've been released, and they tend to be hired by the day or to get stuck in the casual economy, which is one of the reasons why so many return to crime

1998 and 2003. In 2004 the courts started handing down indeterminate sentences – prison terms without fixed limits. These will be partly responsible for the projected growth in imprisonment over the next six years.

This exposes a remarkable contradiction in government policy. At the beginning of last year, the criminal justice ministers sent a begging letter to the courts asking them not to bang so many people up, as the prisons were bursting. But they are bursting because of the mandatory life terms, indeterminate sentences and other stern measures it has forced the judges to pass. In 2002, England and Wales had more lifers (5268) than the whole of the rest of the EU put together (5046). I can't find a more recent comparison, and since the accession of the former communist states this is bound to have changed. But it gives you a rough idea of how weird this country is.

So why, when the number of crimes, especially serious violent crimes, is falling, are both the government and the courts imposing longer sentences? Why does the UK consistently rank in the top two places for imprisonment in western Europe? Why, as this country becomes more peaceful, does it become more punitive? I don't know. Nor, it seems, does anyone else.

Rich and poor

But one thing I've noticed is that many of the states with the highest number of convicts are also those with the greatest differential between rich and poor. Within the OECD nations, the US has the second highest rate of inequality. Mexico, which is the most unequal, has the third-highest rate of imprisonment. In the EU, four of the five most unequal nations also rank among the top five jailers. The correlation, though by no means exact, seems to apply across many of the rich countries.

This doesn't demonstrate a causal re-

lationship. But there are three likely connections. The first is that inequality causes crime. This is what Anatole France referred to, when he claimed to admire "the majestic egalitarianism of the law, which forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread." But, while this has proved true at most times and in most places, crime is falling in England and Wales while inequality is rising.

The second possible link is that prison causes inequality. The sociologist Bruce Western has shown that jail in the United States is a huge and hidden cause of deprivation. When people are locked up, they can't acquire the skills and social contacts they need to get on outside. Employers are reluctant to take them on when they've been released, and they tend to be hired by the day or to get stuck in the casual economy, which is one of the reasons why so many return to crime.

Among whites and Hispanics, wages for ex-cons are severely depressed. Among black people the effect is less marked: the "stigma of imprisonment", Western suggests, appears to have stuck to the entire black underclass.

His ground-breaking research shows that US labour figures, which appeared to prove that the rising tide of the 1990s lifted all boats, were hopelessly skewed. The government's claim that the boom had enhanced everyone's job prospects – even those at the bottom of the heap – turns out to be an artefact of rising imprisonment: convicts aren't counted in household surveys. Western found that while general unemployment fell sharply in the 1990s, when prisoners were included, the rate among unqualified young black men rose to its highest level ever: a gobsmacking 65%.

The third possible reason for a link between the two factors is that inequality causes imprisonment. I can't prove this, and it is hard to see how anyone could

do so. But my untested hypothesis runs as follows: the greater the wealth the top echelons accrue, the more ferociously they demand protection from the rest of society. They have more to lose from crime and less to lose from punishment, which is less likely to strike the richer you become.

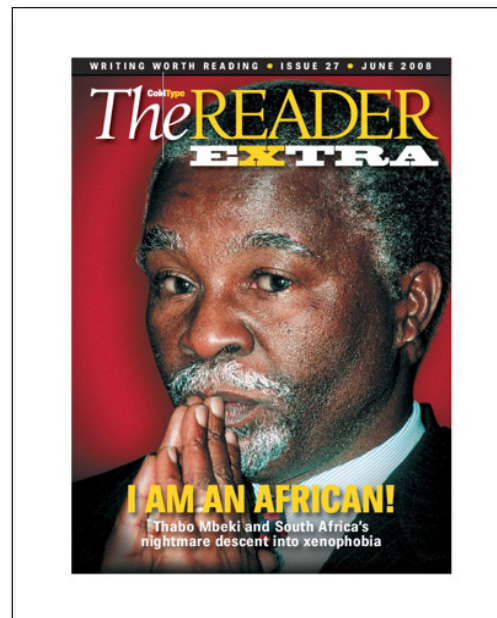
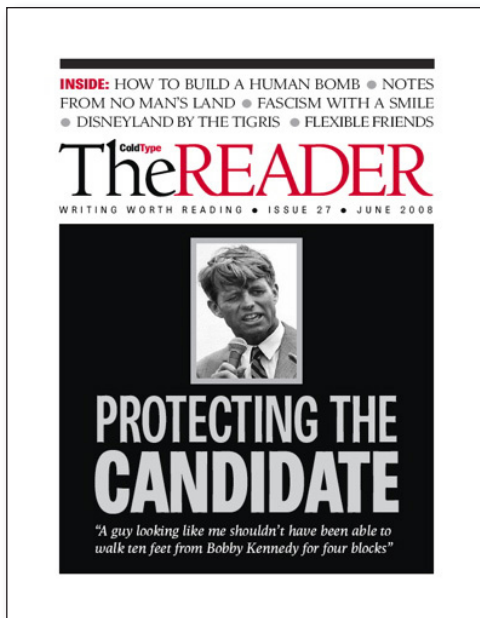
The people who help to generate the public demand for long prison terms (newspaper proprietors and editors) and the people who mete it out (judges and magistrates) are drawn overwhelm-

ingly from the property-owning classes. “Those who have built large fortunes,” Max Hastings, who was once the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, wrote of his former employer Conrad Black, “seldom lose their nervousness that some ill-wisher will find means to take their money away from them.” Money breeds paranoia, and paranoia keeps people in prison. **CT**

They have more to lose from crime and less to lose from punishment, which is less likely to strike the richer you become

*George Monbiot’s latest book is **Bring On The Apocalypse**. This essay originally appeared in the Guardian newspaper*

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Welcome home, soldier. Now shut up

Paul Rockwell tells how the collective denial of battlefield atrocities continues when traumatised soldiers return home

To a stunned audience, Turner presented a photo of the boy's skull, and said: "I am sorry for the hate and destruction I have inflicted on innocent people."

There are two kinds of courage in war – physical courage and moral courage. Physical courage is very common on the battlefield. Men and women on both sides risk their lives, place their own bodies in harm's way. Moral courage, however, is quite rare. According to Chris Hedges, the brilliant former *New York Times* war correspondent who survived wars in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans, "I rarely saw moral courage. Moral courage is harder. It requires the bearer to walk away from the warm embrace of comradeship and denounce the myth of war as a fraud, to name it as an enterprise of death and immorality, to condemn himself, and those around him, as killers. It requires the bearer to become an outcast. There are times when taking a moral stance, perhaps the highest form of patriotism, means facing down the community, even the nation."

More and more U.S. soldiers and Marines, at great cost to their own careers and reputations, are speaking publicly about U.S. atrocities in Iraq, even about the cowardice of their own commanders, who send youth into atrocity-producing situations only to hide from the consequences of their own orders.

In 2007, two brilliant war memoirs – *Road From Ar Ramadi* by Staff Sergeant

Camilo Mejia, and *The Sutras Of Abu Ghraib* by Army Reservist Aidan Delgado – appeared in print. In March 2008, at the Winter Soldier investigation just outside Washington D.C., hard-core U.S. Iraqi veterans, some shaking at the podium, some in tears, unburdened their souls.

Jon Michael Turner described the horrific incident in which, on April 28, 2008, he shot an Iraqi boy in front of his father. His commanding officer congratulated him for "the kill." To a stunned audience, Turner presented a photo of the boy's skull, and said: "I am sorry for the hate and destruction I have inflicted on innocent people."

The Winter Soldier investigation was followed by the publication of *Collateral Damage: America's War Against Iraqi Civilians*, by Chris Hedges and Laila Al-Arian. Based on hundreds of hours of taped interviews with Iraqi combat veterans, this pioneering work on the catastrophe in Iraq includes the largest number of eyewitness accounts from U.S. military personnel on record.

The courage to resist

We cannot understand the psychological and moral significance of military resistance unless we recognize the social forces that stifle conscience and human individuality in military life. Gwen Dyer,

historian of war, writes that ordinarily, “Men will kill under compulsion. Men will do almost anything if they know it is expected of them and they are under strong social pressure to comply.”

“Only exceptional people resist atrocity,” writes psychiatrist Robert Lifton.

How much easier it is to surrender to the will of superiors, to merge into the anonymity of the group. It takes uncommon courage to resist military powers of intimidation, peer pressure, and the atmosphere of racism and hate that drives all imperial wars.

Silencing the witnesses to war

War crimes are collective in nature. Especially in wars based on fraud, soldiers are expected to lie – to their country, to their community, even to themselves. The silencing process begins on the battlefield in the presence of officers, power-holders who seek to nullify the perceptions and personal experience of troops under their command.

In his war memoir, Aidan Delgado describes attempts of his commanders to suppress the truth about Abu Ghraib. First his captain says the Army has nothing to hide, Abu Ghraib is just a rumor. But then the captain continues: “We don’t need to air our dirty laundry in public. If you have photos that you’re not supposed to have, get rid of them. Don’t talk about this to anyone, don’t write about it to anyone back home.” In the U.S. military, the truth is seditious.

Two years ago, Marine Sergeant Jimmy Massey published his riveting autobiography (written with Natasha Saulnier) in France and Spain. How the Marine Corps – through indoctrination and intimidation – transforms a homeboy from the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina into a professional killer who murders “innocent people for his government” is the subject of Massey’s unsettling, impassioned, Jar-head raunchy, and ultimately uplifting memoir, *Cowboys From Hell*. (No

U.S. publisher has picked up the book. A Marine who speaks truth to power is not without honor save in his own country.) In Chapter 18, Jimmy describes a seemingly minor encounter with his captain. Here Massey gives us a look into the process of human denial in its early phase.

Massey has just participated in a checkpoint massacre of civilians. His sense of decency, his sanity, is still in tact. Like any normal human being, he is distraught. The carnage of the war, the imbalance of power between the biggest war machine in history and a suffering people devoid of tanks and air power – the sheer injustice of it all – begins to take its toll on Massey’s conscience.

In the wake of the horrific events of the day, his captain is cool. He walks up to Massey and asks; “Are you doing all right, Staff Sergeant?” Massey responds: “No, sir. I am not doing O.K. Today was a bad day. We killed a lot of innocent civilians.”

Fully of aware of the civilian carnage, his captain asserts: “No, today was a good day.”

Relatives wailing, cars destroyed, blood all over the ground, Marines celebrating, civilians dead, and “it was good day”!

The Massey incident goes beyond the mendacity of military life. It concerns the control, the dehumanization of the psyches of our troops.

As one Vietnam veteran put it years ago: “They kept fucking with my mind.”

In 1994 Jonathan Shay, staff psychiatrist in the Department of Veterans Affairs, published a pioneering work on post traumatic stress – *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. According to Shay, who recorded volumes of testimony from Vietnam veterans, commanders routinely try to efface the perceptions and the normal feelings of compassion among American troops. Military necessity, including the ever-present need for political propaganda, determines what is perceived, and

Relatives wailing, cars destroyed, blood all over the ground, Marines celebrating, civilians dead, and “it was good day”!

THE WAR AT HOME

The fucking colonel says, 'Don't worry about it. We'll take care of it. We got body count.' They'd be handing out fucking medals for killing civilians. So in your mind you're saying, 'Ah, fuck it, they're just gooks'

how it is perceived, in war.

It was an extremely common experience in Vietnam, Shay writes, to be told by military superiors dealing with crime and trauma: "You didn't experience it, it never happened, and you don't know what you know." And it was fairly common for traumatized soldiers to say to reporters: "It didn't happen. And besides, they had it coming." Shay recorded the testimony of one veteran who, in great anger, describes the pressures to alter his perceptions of collective murder.

"Daylight came, and we found out we killed a lot of fishermen and kids...You said to the team, 'Don't worry about it. Everything's fucking fine.' Because that's what we were getting from upstairs. The fucking colonel says, 'Don't worry about it. We'll take care of it. We got body count.' They'd be handing out fucking medals for killing civilians. So in your mind you're saying, 'Ah, fuck it, they're just gooks.' I was sick over it, after this happened. I actually puked my guts out...But see, it's all explained to you by captains and colonels and majors. 'Fuck it, they was suspects anyways. You guys did a great job. Erase it. It's yesterday's fucking news.'"

Willful ignorance at home

The collective process of denial on the battlefield eventually extends to the homeland. Returning soldiers, to be sure, are often honored, but only so long as they remain silent about the realities, the pathos, the absurd evils of war. Willful public ignorance is a source of pain for veterans.

Ernest Hemingway's brilliant short story, *Soldier's Home*, published in 1925 after World War I, gives us insight into the reluctance of civilians to address the psychic needs of soldiers back from war.

The simply told story is about a young man named Krebs who returns to his home in Oklahoma. At first Krebs does not want to talk about the war. But soon

he feels the need to speak – to his family, his neighbors and friends. But as Hemingway tells us, "Nobody wanted to hear about it." His town did not want to learn about atrocities, and "Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie."

There's the rub. His ability to assimilate into civilian life depended on his willingness to fabricate stories about the war. Soldiers are not only expected to lie on behalf of the military during the course of war, they are also expected to participate in homecoming rituals that preserve the civilian fantasy of war's nobility.

In Hemingway's story, the pressure to lie is so powerful, Krebs begins to manufacture stories about his experiences in battle – just to get along, just be able to lead a normal life.

Repression, however, is a major cause of mental illness and loneliness. Krebs morale deteriorates. He sleeps late in bed. He loses interest in work. He withdraws into himself.

That's all Hemingway tells us. It's a quietly told story, all the more powerful for its understatement.

There is a connection between Hemingway's war-informed fiction and real life. As Shay notes, there is a tension between a soldier's need to communalize shame and grief and the unwillingness of civilians to listen to troops whom they sent into battle. One Vietnam veteran told the following story:

"I had just come back from Vietnam and my first wife's parents gave a dinner for me and my parents and her brothers and their wives. And after dinner we were all sitting in the living room and her father said: 'So, tell us what it was like.' And I started to tell them, and I told them. And do you know that within five minutes the room was empty. They were all gone, except my wife. After that I didn't tell anybody what I had seen in Vietnam."

Welcome home, soldier. Now shut up. Notwithstanding clichés and pieties

about support for troops, those who promote war are often the least likely to share the burdens and memories of war when soldiers return. When Ron Kovic, who was paralyzed from the chest down during the war in Vietnam, steered his wheelchair down the aisle of the Republican National Convention in 1972, the delegates spat on him and cheered for Nixon – “Four more years.”

W.D. Erhart, Vietnam veteran and author of *Passing Time*, never forgot the horrific episodes of his tour in Vietnam. In his first autobiography, he tells a friend about his speech at a Rotary Club. “I even put on a coat and tie and went to the Rotary Club. The Rotary Club, for chrissake. I laid it all out for ‘em. I told ‘em about search and destroy missions, harassment and interdiction fire, winning hearts and minds, all that stuff...Was I ever sharp that day.

“Now listen. You won’t believe this. I got done and nobody said a word. No applause. Nothing. Then this skinny old fart shaped like a cold chisel gets up and says he’s a retired colonel, and he thinks we should keep on pounding those little yellow bastards until they do what we say or we kill ‘em all, and he tells me I can’t be a real veteran because a real veteran wouldn’t go around badmouthing the good old U.S. of A., and the whole

place erupts in thunderous applause.”

Welcome home, soldier. Now shut up.

Today Georgia Stillwell is a mother of a 21-year-old Iraqi war veteran. Her son is now homeless, unemployed, and despondent. Early one morning he drove his car over an embankment. She says that her son is a mere physical shell of himself. “My son’s spirit and soul must still be wandering the streets of Iraq.” It is not simply what happened in Iraq, but how veterans are treated at home when they seek to unburden their souls, that reinforces post-traumatic stress. On the night he drove the car off the road, he was crying, talking about the war. “His friends tell me he talks about the war. They describe it as ‘crazy talk.’ He wants the blood of the Iraqis he killed off his hands.”

“Each generation,” writes Chris Hedges, “discovers its own disillusionment, often at a terrible price. And the war in Iraq has begun to produce legions of the lost and the damned.” For our morally courageous veterans – for all of us, really, who seek forgiveness – only the truth can heal.

Paul Rockwell is a national columnist who writes for In Motion magazine and Common Dreams. Contact him at rockyspad@hotmail.com

“Then this skinny old fart shaped like a cold chisel gets up and says he’s a retired colonel, and he thinks we should keep on pounding those little yellow bastards until they do what we say or we kill ‘em all, and he tells me I can’t be a real veteran because a real veteran wouldn’t go around badmouthing the good old U.S. of A., and the whole place erupts in thunderous applause”

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Legalizing occupation

Ramzy Baroud on the Bush government's latest, but probably not the last, political manoeuvre in Iraq

The lonely crusader who once vowed to fight tyranny at any cost is now trying to secure a treaty that would indefinitely secure US interests in Iraq

When US forces descended on Baghdad five years ago, they seemed unstoppable. Military arrogance had reached an all time high, and it seemed only a matter of time before the same frenzied scenario took place in Teheran, Damascus, and elsewhere.

As it turned out, festivities began dwindling almost as soon as they were pronounced. One could argue that the day Saddam's statue was toppled was the very same day that the US army faced its real battle in Iraq, one that continues to hinder long-term strategic planning, if not the once-touted US Middle East project altogether.

Five years of continuous and unrelenting blood baths may have toned down Bush's expectations. The lonely crusader who once vowed to fight tyranny at any cost is now trying to secure a treaty that would indefinitely secure US interests in Iraq. His administration may essentially be hoping to achieve what it regards as the best possible outcome of a worst possible situation.

Co-opting the UN has helped secure temporary legitimacy to the occupation. The international body, once rendered irrelevant, became a major hub for American diplomacy seeking to legitimise its occupation in a country that refuses to concede. Even willing Iraqi leaders, perfectly rehearsed elections and mass sup-

pressions have failed to bring the desired stability and validation.

Of course, White House, State Department and US military spokespeople ventured into endless predictable talk about democracy, freedom, liberty and security in order to woo an increasingly agitated American public. But US action on the ground spoke of another reality: an imperial quest, with monopoly on violence and disregard of international law, the national sovereignty of Iraq and near total disregard of the human rights of its citizens.

Lasting occupation

Now the Bush administration is ready to crown its Iraq travesty with a long-term strategy that would turn Iraq's occupation into a lasting one. The US is 'negotiating' a treaty with the Iraqi government, one that would replace the UN mandate and legalise the US occupation of Iraq permanently.

Basically, time is running out for Bush. If no treaty is reached by the end of the year, his administration could find itself pleading to the Security Council for another extension of the mandate. This would be an embarrassing and dangerous scenario for US diplomacy because it would allow Russia and China to re-emerge as important players wielding fearsome veto powers.

By signing a long-term treaty, the Bush

administration would pre-empt any action by a future Democratic president of Iraq.

When the UN Security Council voted unanimously to extend the US-led multinational forces in Iraq in November 2005, the US celebrated the decision as a sign of international commitment to Iraq's political transition.

John Bolton, US ambassador to the UN at the time, had repeatedly lambasted the UN and now saw "the unanimous adoption of this resolution (as) a vivid demonstration of broad international support for a federal, democratic, pluralistic and unified Iraq."

After this the Pentagon said the "US planned to cut the numbers of troops next year." Since then, the opposite has happened. Iraqi troops failed their first serious test – in failing to crack down on Al Mahdi army – and US forces grew in numbers.

In order for the US to sign a long-term strategic treaty with the Iraqi government, it needs a level of stability. The US military should be able to macro-manage Iraq as troops relegate to their permanent bases – 50 according to a report by Patrick Cockburn in the UK *Independent* – while their Iraqi allies give an illusion of sovereignty in dealing with day-to-day life in Iraq. The US dilemma is that this coveted stability is nowhere in sight.

Since late 2007, officials in the US, the UN and Iraq have asserted that they have no intention of seeking another UN mandate. The US-Iraq treaty is thus the only option that will legalise the American occupation. The idea of the treaty is to give the impression that the relationship between the two is not that of the occupied and the occupier, but two sovereigns with mutual interests and equitable rights.

Iraqis are, unsurprisingly, furious about US expectations from the treaty. According to Cockburn, "Iraqi officials fear that the accord, under which US troops

would occupy permanent bases, conduct military operations, arrest Iraqis and enjoy immunity from Iraqi law, will destabilise Iraq's position in the Middle East and lay the basis for unending conflict in their country."

Iraqi cabinet spokesman Ali Al Dabagh was quoted by Iraqi TV as saying that government will not compromise on Iraq's sovereignty and is committed to "safeguarding Iraq's full sovereignty in line with international resolutions."

Although it is difficult to believe in Prime Minister Al Maliki's commitment to 'full sovereignty,' one cannot underestimate the pressure he faces at the parliament – fractious alliances, nationalists from various backgrounds, unstable Shia front, sceptical Sunni leadership. Aljazeera reported on how two of these legislators testified to the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee that, "US troops should leave Iraq before talks on a long term security pact could be completed."

Early agreement

Khalaf Al-Ullayan, the founder of the National Dialogue Council wants talks delayed "until there is a new administration in the United States," the exact scenario that the Bush administration is hoping to avoid. The US wants an agreement soon, one that would be hard to reverse even by a Democratic president.

To avoid embarrassment, "it's entirely possible that the Bush Administration, sometime this summer, will force the hapless regime of Prime Minister Maliki to submit to a US diktat on a US-Iraq accord." (Robert Dreyfuss, *The Nation*). "If Maliki signs the accord, and ignores the opposition from parliament, he would instantly lose whatever remaining credibility he has left as an Iraqi leader," which would lead to more violence in Iraq at the eve of US elections. "Not a pleasant scenario," asserts Dreyfuss.

One can argue that no pleasant scenarios are possible in Iraq at any time

Since late 2007, officials in the US, the UN and Iraq have asserted that they have no intention of seeking another UN mandate. The US-Iraq treaty is thus the only option that will legalise the American occupation.

STAYING PUT

under a US military presence. Iraq's past treasures were squandered immediately after its 'liberation' by US forces, and its present is daunted by bloodshed and uncertainty. The Bush administration now wants to ensure that the country's future is also compromised by violence, humiliation and war.

CT

Ramzy Baroud (www.ramzybaroud.net) is an author and editor of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His work has been published in newspapers and journals worldwide.

His latest book is *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle* (Pluto Press, London).

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Jail time for George Tenet?

The former director of the CIA could be in trouble if any court examines his evidence at the 9/11 Commission, says **Ray McGovern**

President George W. Bush used to complain that being president was “hard work,” but he has got over that. Now he says it “has been a fabulous experience.”

Why fabulous? Well, a good part of it has to do with his past.

When Bush screwed up royally – whether in his personal or business affairs – he had to suffer the humiliation of asking his father or his father’s friends (sometimes Arab friends) to bail him out.

But now? Wow! As president, young George has found he can escape accountability altogether.

Now when he screws up royally, he need not call Dad; George W. Bush is himself in control of all the levers he needs to pull in order to bail himself out. Is this a great country or what?

An invertebrate Congress has been a big help. But his greatest asset limiting his liability has been the kind of folk he has gotten to work for him. The kind like Vice President Dick Cheney’s former chief of staff, Scooter Libby, whom he has no problem asking to lie for him, when required.

For Bush’s powers are formidable – as he showed when Libby, convicted perjurer and obstructor of justice, was about to get off to prison. The president com-

mutated Libby’s sentence, sending a message to others who might be called on to lie for him to hang tough and count on commutation or pardon.

A president’s unlimited power to pardon serves as the ultimate trump card to keep friends and associates out of jail.

Even so, one key aide, former CIA Director and Medal of Freedom winner, George Tenet, can be forgiven for being somewhat apprehensive these days. For he has lied under oath regarding what Bush knew about the 9/11 attacks and how early Bush knew it.

Concealing pre-9/11 warnings that Bush received might have seemed like the smart play during the president’s first term when his popularity was high and few in Washington dared to stand up to him.

However, if the American voters choose to send vertebrates to the next Congress – or if the Justice Department starts taking seriously its duty to require honest testimony from senior government officials – Tenet may be looking at some jail time.

With the possibility of large changes in the political landscape early next year, all bets might be off.

As for Tenet’s potential legal jeopardy, let’s leave aside for now the obviously heinous – like running George W. Bush’s

Concealing pre-9/11 warnings that Bush received might have seemed like the smart play during the president’s first term

LEGAL JEOPARDY

George Tenet did sound the alarm often and loudly. But as a retroactive glance at August 2001 shows, the president, literally, could not be bothered

global Gestapo complete with secret prisons and torture chambers, a criminal enterprise that Tenet carved out of the operations directorate of the CIA.

Let's pick a case of simpler, more familiar white-collar crimes – Libby-style perjury and obstruction of justice.

Credit to Rep. Dennis Kucinich, whose 35 Articles of Impeachment against Bush – specifically Articles 33 and 34 relating to the catastrophe of 9/11 – have freshened memories, stirred additional research and demonstrate why Tenet may be looking at some prison time.

Article 33 charges that the president “REPEATEDLY IGNORED AND FAILED TO RESPOND TO HIGH-LEVEL INTELLIGENCE WARNINGS OF PLANNED TERRORIST ATTACKS IN THE US, PRIOR TO 9/11.”

The text contains a devastating run-down of the many times President Bush was warned that an attack was coming and did nothing.

George Tenet did sound the alarm often and loudly. But as a retroactive glance at August 2001 shows, the president, literally, could not be bothered.

Tenet's own performance was hardly blameless. The 9/11 Commission found numerous screw-ups within the CIA, and Tenet's discharge of his statutory duty to coordinate the work of the entire intelligence community was abysmal.

It was his responsibility to ensure that the FBI, CIA and other intelligence agencies were sharing information freely on this priority issue. Sadly, Tenet preferred backslapping to holding the intelligence community to professional standards of work and conduct.

Article 33 of Impeachment shows that President Bush's inaction in the face of myriad warnings prior to 9/11 constitutes utter failure with respect to his Constitutional duties to take proper steps to protect the nation.

Those who remember Watergate and other misadventures will be aware, too,

that the cover-up of wrongdoing constitutes an additional – and often more provable – crime, especially when it involves perjury and obstruction of justice.

That's where George Tenet comes in. Until now, Bush has managed to escape blame for his outrageous inactivity before 9/11 because his subordinates – first and foremost, Tenet – have covered up for him.

This is what is dealt with in Article 34 of Impeachment: OBSTRUCTION OF INVESTIGATION INTO THE ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.

A Faustian bargain

What did the president know, and when did he know it?

This double question, with Watergate antecedents, is the one that Bush and Cheney had to guard most carefully against.

By all appearances, they had little trouble enlisting a malleable-cum-guilty-conscience George Tenet in this effort at denial and obfuscation. And this helps to explain some of the more bizarre episodes of that time.

Faustian bargain? Call it mutual blackmail, if you prefer the vernacular.

Yes, Tenet gave the president enough warning to warrant, to compel some sort of action on his part. But Tenet's lackadaisical management of the CIA and intelligence community was at least as important a factor in the success of the attacks of 9/11.

The *raison d'être* of the CIA had been to prevent another Pearl Harbor. Yet, 9/11 took more lives than the Japanese attack in 1941.

As before Pearl Harbor, significant pieces of intelligence lay around but analysts failed to put them all together.

It was long since clear to many in Washington that, had George Tenet stayed home long enough to tend to his knitting – his management responsibilities – instead of eternally hobnobbing

abroad with kings and other potentates, 9/11 might well have been avoided, even with an indolent president.

Of course, Tenet should have been fired after 9/11. But President Bush needed Tenet, or at least Tenet's silence, as much as Tenet needed Bush, or at least Bush's forgiveness.

What developed might be described as a case of mutual blackmail disguised as bonhomie. Bush was keenly aware that Tenet had the wherewithal to let the world know how many warnings he had given the president – reducing Bush to a criminally negligent, blundering fool.

Were that to happen, Bush would have to kiss goodbye the role of cheerleader/war president – and so much else. Thus, Tenet had become critical to Bush's political survival.

And Tenet? All he needed was not to be blamed – not to be fired. The bargain: I, George Bush, will keep you on and even praise your performance; you, George Tenet, will keep your mouth shut about all the warnings you gave me during the spring and summer of 2001. Tenet, it seems clear, agreed.

The bargain was no secret to insiders. Former House speaker Newt Gingrich, still very much of the Washington scene, commented publicly that Tenet was so grateful that the president let him stay on as CIA director, that he would do anything for him. Events proved Gingrich right. And there was even a Medal of Freedom in it for Tenet – but, alas, eventual criminal liability as well.

Anatomy of a deal

On Sept. 26, 2001, the president motored out to CIA headquarters, puts his arm around Tenet and told the cameras, "We've got the best intelligence we can possibly have thanks to the men and women of the CIA."

Then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, as was so often the case, had not been clued in.

On Sept. 23, Powell had promised a "White Paper" that would make a "persuasive case" that Osama bin Laden was responsible for the 9/11 attacks. His announcement met immediate resistance from the White House, however, and, less than two weeks later, Powell actually apologized for his "unfortunate choice of words."

There would be no White Paper, he said; rather, the American people would have to rely on "information coming out in the press and other ways."

It became gradually clear why Powell reneged. The evidence against bin Laden could not be disclosed because there was simply too much of it available for the reading well before 9/11.

To reveal this would bring extreme political embarrassment and vitiate the Faustian bargain with Tenet.

Small wonder that the White House preferred a whitewash to a White Paper.

And this has been a constant since the fall of 2001. Administration obstructionism and intransigence has succeeded in hindering all subsequent investigations into what Bush and Cheney had been told prior to 9/11. Until now, at least.

Perjury, obstruction of justice

In his sworn testimony of April 14, 2004, before the 9/11 Commission, Tenet outdid himself trying to honor his bargain with Bush. The commissioners were interested in what the president had been told during the critical month of August 2001.

Answering a question from Commissioner Timothy Roemer, Tenet referred to the president's long vacation (July 29-Aug. 30) in Crawford and insisted that he did not see the president at all in August.

"You never talked with him?" Roemer asked.

"No," Tenet replied, explaining that for much of August he, too, was "on leave."

That same evening, a CIA spokesman

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LEGAL JEOPARDY

Funny how Tenet could have forgotten his first visit to Crawford, whereas in his memoir, *At the Center of the Storm*, Tenet waxed eloquent about the “president graciously driving me around the spread in his pickup and me trying to make small talk about the flora and the fauna”

called reporters to say that Tenet had misspoken, and that he had briefed Bush on Aug. 17 and 31, 2001. The spokesman played down the Aug. 17 briefing as uneventful and indicated that the second briefing took place after Bush had returned to Washington.

Funny how Tenet could have forgotten his first visit to Crawford, whereas in his memoir, *At the Center of the Storm*, Tenet waxed eloquent about the “president graciously driving me around the spread in his pickup and me trying to make small talk about the flora and the fauna.”

But the visit was not limited to small talk.

In his book Tenet writes: “A few weeks after the August 6 PDB was delivered, I followed it to Crawford to make sure the president stayed current on events.”

The Aug. 6, 2001 President’s Daily Brief contained the article “Bin Laden Determined to Strike in the US.” According to Ron Suskind’s *The One-Percent Doctrine*, the president reacted by telling the CIA briefer, “All right, you’ve covered your ass now.”

Clearly, Tenet needed to follow up on that.

Was Tenet again in Crawford just one week later? According to a White House press release, President Bush on Aug. 25 told visitors to Crawford, “George Tenet and I” drove up the canyon “yesterday.”

Flora and fawner?

If, as Tenet says in his memoir, it was the Aug. 6, 2001, PDB that prompted his visit on Aug. 17, what might have brought him back on Aug. 24?

I believe the answer is to be found in court documents released at the trial of Zacarias Moussaoui, the fledgling pilot in Minnesota interested in learning to steer a plane but indifferent as to how to land it.

Those documents show that on Aug. 23, 2001, Tenet was given an alarming briefing, focusing on Moussaoui, titled

“Islamic Extremist Learns to Fly.” Tenet was told that Moussaoui was training to fly a 747 and, among other suspicion-arousing data, had paid for the training in cash.

The FBI arrested him on Aug. 16 on grounds he had overstayed his 90-day visa and the CIA was working on the case with the FBI. This might well have been what led Tenet to go back to Crawford on the 24th.

There is no indication that the president or Tenet ever followed up with senior FBI officials. Then-Acting FBI Director Thomas Pickard has testified that he did not learn of it until the afternoon of Sept. 11, 2001.

Things proceeded more quickly at the working level, at least for this discrete part of the problem. Tenet’s analysts had learned about Moussaoui in a back-door message from the FBI Field Office in Minneapolis enlisting CIA’s help in obtaining information on Moussaoui from French intelligence.

The Minneapolis case agent had already telephoned the FBI legal attaché office in Paris, which contacted the French government on Aug. 16 or 17.

With unusual speed, on Aug. 22 and 27, the French provided information that made a connection between Moussaoui and a rebel leader in Chechnya, Ibn al Khattab, and indicated that Khattab had a connection with Osama bin Laden.

Court documents from the Moussaoui case also show that on Aug. 30, 2001, CIA analysts were able to confirm to Tenet that Moussaoui had ties with radical fundamentalist groups and Osama bin Laden. This would have been good grist for Tenet’s briefing of the president on Aug. 31 in Washington.

Nevertheless, in Tenet’s sworn testimony before the 9/11 Commission on April 14, 2004, he said he had not mentioned Moussaoui to the president during August 2001. Tenet further testified that he did not report on Moussaoui at the cabi-

net-level meeting convened on Sept. 4 to discuss terrorism.

On May 6, 2007, when Tim Russert asked Tenet what the president knew and when he knew it, Tenet replied that “everything went silent” in August 2001.

Russert asked Tenet why he did not go directly to the president in July 2001 after he had warned then-national security adviser Condoleezza Rice of the possibility of “spectacular, multiple, simultaneous attacks against US targets with little or no warning” and gotten the brush-off.

Tenet replied lamely “the president is not the action officer.”

Tenet not only was, by statute, the president’s principal foreign intelligence adviser but – by all accounts – enjoyed a backslapping rapport with him. Tenet also briefed the president six mornings a week.

It strains credulity to suggest that Tenet was afraid to go directly to George Bush for fear of appearing to be making some sort of end-run around his national security adviser on a terrorist threat about which Tenet’s hair was said to be “on fire?”

Tenet at breakfast on 9/11

No one wants to believe that the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, could have been prevented, but we do a disservice to our country, and to one another, if we stay in denial.

No one wants to believe that President Bush had considerably more forewarning than he acknowledges, but it is very clear that he did. It is equally clear that George Tenet has been a prime mover in hiding

the amount of intelligence available to Bush to act on.

Reviewing the evidence on May 26, 2002, Michael Getler, then-ombudsman for the *Washington Post*, alluded to one very telling sign leaping out of a conversation between George Tenet and former Sen. David Boren over breakfast on 9/11.

When an aide rushed up to tell Tenet of the attacks, Tenet’s immediate reaction was “This has bin Laden all over it... I wonder if it has anything to do with this guy taking pilot training.”

Getler notes for his readers that the reference is to Zacarias Moussaoui.

A few months after 9/11, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the FBI did not tell the White House about Moussaoui until after Sept. 11. That may be true, particularly if, as noted above, then-Acting Director Thomas Pickard did not learn about Moussaoui until 9/11.

But the evidence is very strong that Tenet told Bush chapter and verse.

The extraordinary lengths to which Tenet has gone to disguise that has the former CIA director skating very close to perjury – if not over the line.

Plus, if Tenet is held accountable after Bush leaves town to go back to Texas for good, there may be no one in the White House willing to pardon him. **CT**

Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington, DC. A CIA analyst for 27 years, he worked on the President’s Daily Brief under presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan.

When an aide rushed up to tell Tenet of the attacks, Tenet’s immediate reaction was “This has bin Laden all over it... I wonder if it has anything to do with this guy taking pilot training”

Read the best of

Edward S. Herman

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When a little dissent is too much

Norman Solomon tells how a TV anchor paid a high price for his low opinion of Bill O'Reilly

When the cameras started rolling, it quickly became clear that he'd actually read the book – and was willing to explore its documentation and damning implications about the use of media to drag the United States into one war after another

Over the years, once in a great while, I've been surprised to cross paths with a journalist at a major TV outlet who actually seems willing and able to go outside the conventional boundaries of media discourse.

That's what happened one day in the fall of 2005 at the Boston headquarters of the CN8 television network, owned and operated by the corporate media giant Comcast. I showed up for an interview about my book *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. My expectations weren't very high.

After all, I was setting foot in the studios of a large commercial TV channel with wide distribution of its programming in New England and beyond. And Comcast, shall we say, has earned a reputation as a voracious media conglomerate with scant interest in the public interest.

I was scheduled to appear on a prime-time nightly show hosted by Barry Nolan, a longtime TV newsman. When the cameras started rolling, it quickly became clear that he'd actually read the book – and was willing to explore its documentation and damning implications about the use of media to drag the United States into one war after another.

Wow, I thought. This guy Nolan has

some guts. I wonder how he gets away with it.

As I later learned, Nolan – then in his late 50s – had a long record of satisfying the producers of high-profile TV shows. Overall, he was hardly a renegade. During most of the 1990s, for instance, he was an anchor of “Hard Copy,” a syndicated and rather tabloid-like TV show.

I was interviewed by Nolan two more times, most recently last fall. I found him consistently well-informed, thoughtful, concerned with substance and willing to follow evidence to logical conclusions.

Nolan was apparently trying to provide the kind of public affairs coverage that's in short supply from a TV world of superficial cable quip-fests and defamations.

In other words, Barry Nolan was trying to be what Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly is not.

And it turns out that Nolan isn't just a good journalist. He's also someone willing to take a risk on behalf of his conscience.

“Barry Nolan's opinion of Bill O'Reilly spun him right out of his job,” the ABC News website reported late last month. “The fed-up TV newsman lost his anchor seat after protesting a decision by a New England media association to bestow its top journalism award on the Fox News

anchor.”

Comcast fired Nolan from his job as an anchor at the network’s “Backstage” program. While Nolan was free to think it was outrageous that the New England chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences opted to give its highest honor to O’Reilly, the network’s problem was that Nolan actually did something about it.

At a May 10 banquet for the awards ceremony, Nolan passed out a six-page summary of some of the low points of O’Reilly’s career. “Nolan said he objects to the commentator’s bullying style, claiming that O’Reilly frequently bends the facts in order to get across what he described as venomous opinions,” ABC News reported online. “It’s not the type of journalism that should be recognized in the profession for excellence, he said.”

The Comcast management thought that Nolan’s use of the First Amendment was unbecoming of an anchor.

Barry Nolan’s response: “I’m interested in telling everyone in the country to stand up and say something is wrong when something is wrong. We’ve been through an awful dark time in our history where

there are a lot of people telling you to sit down and shut up. From Dick Cheney to Bill O’Reilly, I’m done with bullies.”

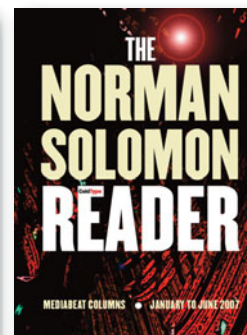
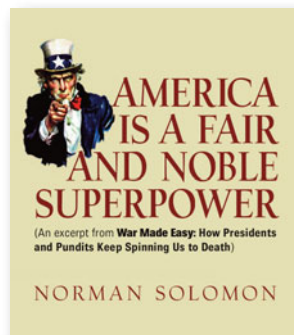
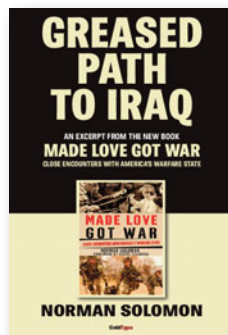
Later, in an article that appeared on the Think Progress website, Nolan elaborated: “O’Reilly was an appalling choice, not because of his political views, but because he simply gets the facts wrong, abuses his guests and the powerless in general, is delusional, and, well, you might want to Google: Narcissistic Personality Disorder.”

But what Barry Nolan quietly passed out at the awards dinner was not a matter of opinion. He provided information – in particular, direct quotes from O’Reilly. And that was too much for the Comcast network. As Nolan puts it, “I got fired from my job on a news and information network for reporting demonstrably true things in a room full of news people.” **CT**

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*Norman Solomon’s books include **War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.** A documentary film of the same name, based on the book, has been released on home video.*

Read the best of **Norman Solomon**



<http://coldtype.net/solomon.html>

Rounding up the corporate predators

Danny Schechter on the first arrests in the US mortgage scandal

This is an example of how TV news organizations sensationalize to generate ratings while ignoring a far more pervasive reality by the same name confronting many more people who are losing their homes and their hope

Stephen Colbert has a popular feature in his Comedy Channel rants of the day. He calls it “The Word”, and he explains how language can have different meanings. Consider the word “predator.”

My online dictionary offers two meanings, one for the animal world and one for ours.

Predator: noun – an animal that naturally preys on others. Wolves are major predators of rodents. figurative – a rapacious, exploitative person or group. Her wealth made her vulnerable to predators. (Note: poverty also can make one vulnerable.)

In popular usage there are two others. One references companies and scammers who engage in predatory lending. They are behind the subprime loans that took advantage of so many people resulting in the collapse of our markets and a threat to the global economy. Despite its pervasive presence, this type of predatory behavior does not find its way into the news much because of its connotation of criminality.

The other use is associated with men who use the internet to lure young people into sex. No one really knows how pervasive the practice is – most of the fig-

ures have been hyped and exaggerated. Yet, because of its salaciousness, it has been the subject of a popular prime time TV segment, NBC’s “To Catch a Predator,” which has made parents fearful that legions of perverts are lurking online to solicit their kids.

Yet, when the *Columbia Journalism Review* analyzed the show, it found it to be exploitative, factually inaccurate and a disservice. *CJR* showed how the show inflated a problem for the sake of entertainment, as opposed to reporting one as news.

This is an example of how TV news organizations sensationalize to generate ratings while ignoring a far more pervasive reality by the same name confronting many more people who are losing their homes and their hope.

Now that the Justice Department and the FBI are indicting and rounding up this type of predator, the criminal nature of this problem has finally been validated. Last month, two former hedge fund managers at Bear Stearns were busted for defrauding investors to the tune of a billion dollars. Another 400 scammers were arrested in “Operation Malicious Mortgage,” an FBI-run investigation staffed by 180 agents serving 40 task forces working more than 1,200 cases.

So far, no TV network has announced

a special series on these corporate predators, but the *New York Times* business section has become a subcrime scene with pictures of the perps. There have been reports about an executive for a Swiss bank who encouraged Americans to violate the law by moving money illicitly into offshore accounts, as well as a profile of another hedge fund crook, now on the run, chased by U.S. marshals as he tried to escape a jail sentence. The *Times* even published a Wanted poster.

The investigation of this white-collar crime wave is a bit late since trillions have already been lost. Legal experts say the top dogs may walk because of the difficulties of proving that what they did was a crime.

Historian Carolyn Baker, who follows the economic crisis for her Speaking Truth to Power website, states: "History will prove that the number of people busted for this is only a drop in the bucket compared to the number involved in nationwide blatant fraud and theft which created the largest mortgage meltdown in the history of the world. A few bad apples? Get a clue! The scam was rampant and epidemic."

Aaron Krowne, who edits the indispensable insider MI-implode.com mortgage site, agrees: "It's not like the current execs would have done anything different; this is all just plausible deniability and saving face, so that angry investors (the general public – including Aunt Millie's pension fund) who are being diluted to oblivion won't be able to say 'nothing is being done.'"

What's worse, while these arrests capture the headlines, the industry is busy lobbying Congress to back off on regulations of its latest bubble-blowing exercise.

Reported the *Washington Post*: "Wall Street banks and other large financial institutions have begun putting intense pressure on Congress to hold off on legislation that would curtail their highly

profitable trading in oil contracts – an activity increasingly blamed by lawmakers for driving up prices to record levels."

Yes, there are criminal practices under way, but they are far more insidious than most people realize.

For example, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson is using the crisis as a cover to call for more power to the Federal Reserve Bank, which is actually an entity run by private banks in their own interest. (The bank itself was created in response to a manufactured banking crisis in 1907.) Committee chairmen in Congress are not rushing to discuss his proposals reportedly, in part, because Paulson has done so little about the worsening foreclosure problem.

Constant battle

Read some history, like lawyer Ellen Hodgson Brown's well-documented book *Web of Debt*, and you will see that a battle between financial capital and the public interest over who controls our money supply has been a constant over the decades.

The book reminds us that former Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan, whom many now blame for allowing the housing bubble to burst, was on the board of JP Morgan before joining the Fed. It was the Fed, of course, that recently bailed out Bear Stearns by giving Morgan \$30 billion to buy the company. Morgan boasted recently in an unseemly way about what a bargain it got.

Americans have been fighting for economic justice from before there was an America. The colonists opposed taxation without representation. They rose up against the kind of debt that is enslaving so many of us now and seems to be leading to a total economic breakdown.

If President Dwight David Eisenhower were alive today, he might have warned us of another complex, as well as the military-industrial behemoth, that is threatening our economic well-being as

"History will prove that the number of people busted for this is only a drop in the bucket compared to the number involved in nationwide blatant fraud and theft which created the largest mortgage meltdown in the history of the world. A few bad apples? Get a clue! The scam was rampant and epidemic"

SEEKING JUSTICE

a nation. Imagine if his famous farewell address were updated to sound like this:

“In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the financialization of America and its CREDIT AND DEBT complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

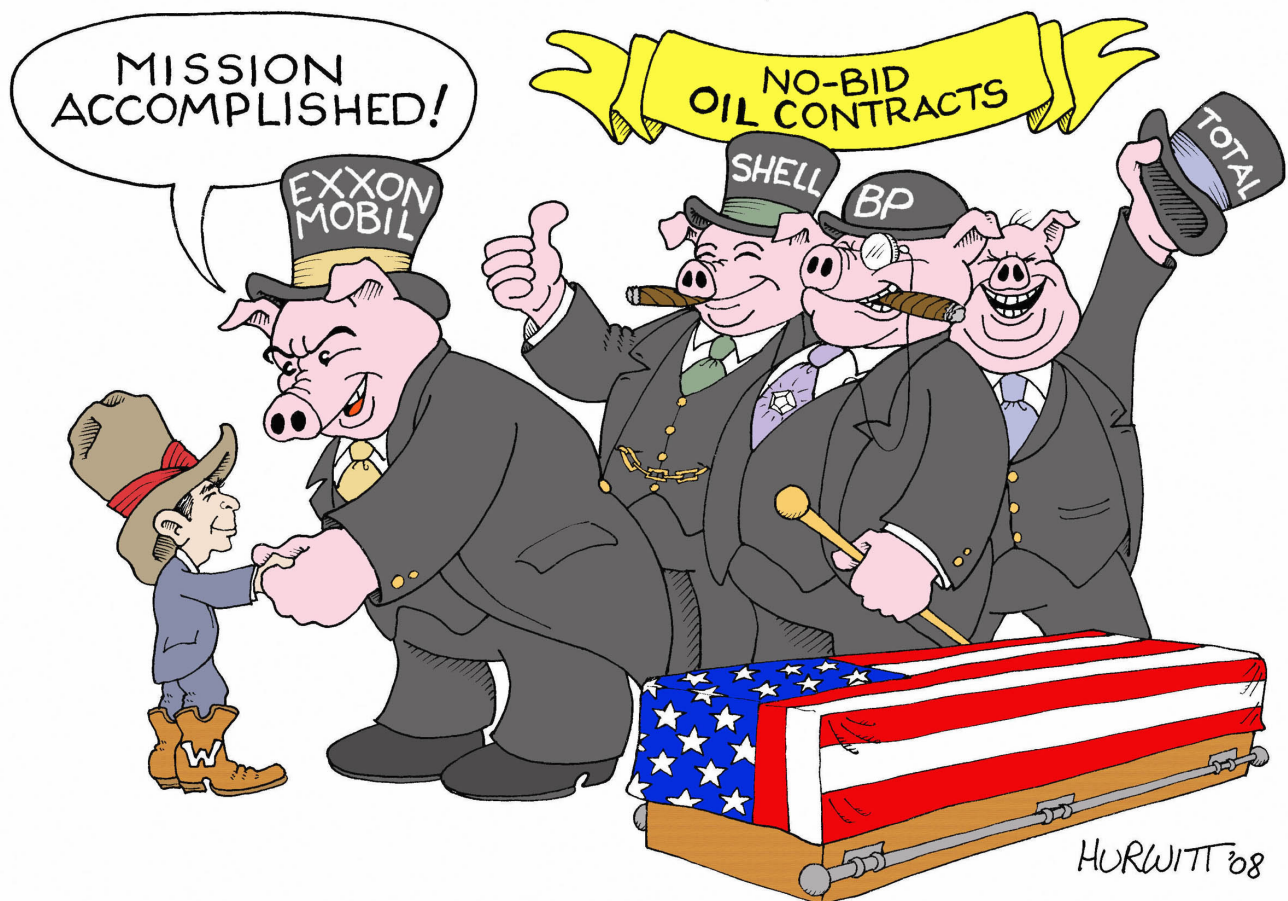
“We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or

democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of our FINANCIAL SYSTEM and ECONOMIC JUSTICE so that security and liberty may prosper together.” **CT**

*Danny Schechter writes a blog for MediaChannel.org. He is the author of **Plunder**, a forthcoming book on America's financial crisis*

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitz



The hedonists of power

Chris Hedges is unhappy with politicians who break their word and the media elite who deceive us in the name of journalism

Washington has become Versailles. We are ruled, entertained and informed by courtiers. The popular media are courtiers. The Democrats, like the Republicans, are courtiers. Our pundits and experts are courtiers. We are captivated by the hollow stagecraft of political theater as we are ruthlessly stripped of power. It is smoke and mirrors, tricks and con games. We are being had.

June was a good month if you were a courtier. We were instructed by the high priests on television to mourn a Sunday morning talk show host, who made \$5 million a year and who gave a platform to the powerful and the famous so they could spin, equivocate and lie to the nation.

We were repeatedly told by these television courtiers, people like Tom Brokaw and Wolf Blitzer, that this talk show host was one of our nation's greatest journalists, as if sitting in a studio, putting on makeup and chatting with Dick Cheney or George W. Bush have much to do with journalism.

No journalist makes \$5 million a year. No journalist has a comfortable, cozy relationship with the powerful. No journalist believes that acting as a conduit, or a stenographer, for the powerful is a primary part of his or her calling. Those

in power fear and dislike real journalists. Ask Seymour Hersh and Amy Goodman how often Bush or Cheney has invited them to dinner at the White House or offered them an interview.

All governments lie, as I.F. Stone pointed out, and it is the job of the journalist to do the hard, tedious reporting to shine a light on these lies. It is the job of courtiers, those on television playing the role of journalists, to feed off the scraps tossed to them by the powerful and never question the system. In the slang of the profession, these television courtiers are "throats."

These courtiers, including the late Tim Russert, never gave a voice to credible critics in the buildup to the war against Iraq. They were too busy playing their roles as red-blooded American patriots. They never fought back in their public forums against the steady erosion of our civil liberties and the trashing of our Constitution.

These courtiers blindly accept the administration's current propaganda to justify an attack on Iran. They parrot this propaganda. They dare not defy the corporate state. The corporations that employ them make them famous and rich. It is their Faustian pact.

No class of courtiers, from the eunuchs behind Manchus in the 19th century to

No journalist makes \$5 million a year. No journalist has a comfortable, cozy relationship with the powerful. No journalist believes that acting as a conduit, or a stenographer, for the powerful is a primary part of his or her calling

POLITICAL ABUSE

The bill gives the U.S. government a license to eavesdrop on our phone calls and e-mails. It demolishes our right to privacy. It endangers the work of journalists, human rights workers, crusading lawyers and whistle-blowers who attempt to expose abuses the government seeks to hide

the Baghdad caliphs of the Abbasid caliphate, has ever transformed itself into a responsible elite. Courtiers are hedonists of power.

Our Versailles has been recently. The Democrats passed the FISA bill, which provides immunity for the telecoms that cooperated with the National Security Agency's illegal surveillance over the past six years. This bill, which when signed means we will never know the extent of the Bush White House's violation of our civil liberties, is expected to be adopted by the Senate. Barack Obama has promised to sign it in the name of national security.

The bill gives the U.S. government a license to eavesdrop on our phone calls and e-mails. It demolishes our right to privacy. It endangers the work of journalists, human rights workers, crusading lawyers and whistle-blowers who attempt to expose abuses the government seeks to hide.

These private communications can be stored indefinitely and disseminated, not just to the U.S. government but to other governments as well. The bill, once signed into law, will make it possible for those in power to identify and silence anyone who dares to make public information that defies the official narrative.

Being a courtier, and Obama is one of the best, requires agility and eloquence. The most talented of them can be lauded as persuasive actors. They entertain us. They make us feel good. They convince us they are our friends. We would like to have dinner with them. They are the smiley faces of a corporate state that has hijacked the government and is raping the nation.

When the corporations make their iron

demands, these courtiers drop to their knees, whether to placate the telecommunications companies that fund their campaigns and want to be protected from lawsuits, or to permit oil and gas companies to rake in obscene profits and keep in place the vast subsidies of corporate welfare doled out by the state.

We cannot differentiate between illusion and reality. We trust courtiers wearing face powder who deceive us in the name of journalism.

We trust courtiers in our political parties who promise to fight for our interests and then pass bill after bill to further corporate fraud and abuse.

We confuse how we feel about courtiers like Obama and Russert with real information, facts and knowledge. We chant in unison with Obama that we want change, we yell "yes we can," and then stand dumbly by as he coldly votes away our civil liberties.

The Democratic Party, including Obama, continues to fund the war. It refuses to impeach Bush and Cheney. It allows the government to spy on us without warrants or cause. And then it tells us it is our salvation. This is a form of collective domestic abuse. And, as so often happens in the weird pathology of victim and victimizer, we keep coming back for more. **CT**

*Chris Hedges, who was a Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign correspondent for The New York Times, says he will vote for Ralph Nader for president. An excerpt from his new book, **Collateral Damage: America's War Against Iraqi Civilians**, Co-authored by Laila al-Arian, is featured in this month's issue of the ColdType Reader Extra.*

Read the best of **Tom Engelhardt**

<http://coldtype.net/tom.html>

The beginning of global order

If people united against politicians and global capitalists the world could become a better place, argues **Pablo Ouziel**

We can continue to believe our politicians as they echo messages of stability and order around our planet, and we can continue to feed off the BBC or the *New York Times* to get an insight into the normality of the global situation, but sooner or later, the collapse of our economies is going to affect us directly by hitting our pockets, and then perhaps we will be ready to act. Hopefully, against those politicians and global capitalists who are infecting our daily life by bringing a painful and miserable reality to the majority of humanity.

Yesterday, as I drove on the motorway towards Barcelona, I was overcome with tears. Lining the roads were truckers slowing the traffic, waving banners and making noise, while the rest of the drivers in their cars were feeling annoyed at the inconvenience of a minority obstructing their daily routine. The radio was repeating negative messages about the truckers and politicians told us over and over that these people were a minority, and that the rest of us should not worry, because they would not achieve the goal of disrupting the flow of petrol or the arrival of goods from one point to another.

As this was happening in Spain, discontented truckers in different points of the planet were also complaining. Their

complain was a simple one, “We can no longer afford to feed our families”. Yet, solidarity is running so short these days, that isolated groups get affected by the global economic situation, while the rest of us continue our routine without paying much attention to their pleas.

People are failing to see the connection between the truckers today, the fishermen a few weeks ago, the homeowners losing their homes, and the global revolts because of rising food prices. The people being affected directly are giving us a warning of things to come, and the only way this can be reversed, is if we group together and support those who are feeling the pain right now. We have not been smart enough to understand that we are being taken for a ride, that affected groups are being kept isolated by the magic wand of the mainstream media regurgitating the propagandistic message of the ruling elite.

Everyday, the global situation is getting worse. As strikes are on the rise and unemployment is increasing, we must be alert, we must understand what is happening. The elites will continue to keep us divided, because divided is how they can control us, but we must be smarter than them and understand that the only strength we have against their policies, is the collective strength of united discontent.

People are failing to see the connection between the truckers today, the fishermen a few weeks ago, homeowners losing their homes, and the global revolts because of rising food prices

SOLIDARITY

What a coincidence that oil prices are rising today, as the West is on a rampage against the Arab world, supporting the slaughter of the people in Gaza, supporting the destruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, and showing an ever growing hostility towards Iran

When will we understand that our politicians are lying? Will we ever understand that the mainstream media is not democratic and that the police is there to defend the interests of the wealthy? One can see clearly whose interest the police serves when those who protest and strike have guns pointed at them.

Only a few years ago, Argentineans were going to the bank to retrieve their money, and instead of happy clerks, they found hostile policemen telling them to go away. Their money was not theirs anymore, it was gone. Yet, the owners of the banks never lost anything, all their money was out of the country, and once that country had collapsed, they came back again with smiles buying things cheap. I often meet Argentineans, and frequently they tell me that a global “corralito” is what is about to happen.

The sad thing is that I do not need their wisdom to understand that, because I am seeing it with my own eyes. Friends are losing their homes, others are losing their jobs, oil prices are making life hard for those close to me who have to commute everyday, and the hopelessness of the situation is slowly breaking the fabric of the community in which I live.

While bankers and politicians speak of inflation being under control, recession being an illusion, and economic fundamentals being strong, I am led to believe that in their world – wherever that is – they are not exposed to reality. Yet the truth is, that they know the reality much better than I do, they have access to information which I will only see years from now, when hopefully they are punished for their crimes against humanity.

Going back to those truckers whom I saw furious on the motorway, people must begin to see that they were not obstructing normality, but rather pointing out an abnormality which global citizens must unite to correct. We should have all stopped our cars in support of the truckers, because by supporting the truckers

we would be supporting ourselves.

We should have demanded that CEOs of oil companies stop receiving multi-million dollar salaries, we should have demanded that our governments implement measures to limit the rising prices of oil, we should have ultimately asked that our governments seize all their hostilities against the oil producing countries, many of those currently in the Middle East.

The last time oil prices skyrocketed was in 1973 when the members of Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries OAPEC, announced, as a result of the ongoing Yom Kippur War, that they would no longer ship oil to nations that had supported Israel in its conflict with Syria and Egypt.

What a coincidence that oil prices are rising today, as the West is on a rampage against the Arab world, supporting the slaughter of the people in Gaza, supporting the destruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, and showing an ever growing hostility towards Iran.

We must begin to pave the path to peace in order to gain global stability, and that must be done by setting measures to stop speculators from benefiting from the misery of others, by punishing corrupt politicians, and by collectively understanding that bankers are rich because we have placed our money in their hands.

Ultimately, unless we begin to see the world as a whole, in which things are truly interconnected, our governments will continue their hostilities, oil prices will keep on rising, and when the time comes for us to complain, we will be faced with the guns of the police whom we have helped to create with the payment of our taxes. The only positive thing coming out of this chaos, is that we are no longer able to avoid facing reality, and soon after this social tsunami which has begun to unravel is over, we will be faced with a true opportunity to collectively construct global order.

CT

Pablo Ouziel is a Spanish sociologist and freelance writer

Why I can't support Obama

Despite the heady rhetoric, it appears that the Democratic candidate may turn out to be another dud, says **Joshua Frank**

Four years ago, as the sentiment against George W. Bush's administration mounted, the entire left-wing spectrum hung on tight to the coattails of John Kerry, grasping for dear life. Critics called it the "Anybody but Bush" syndrome, but it should have been more aptly coined "Nobody but Kerry."

Virtually every progressive cause, from labor to the environment, had been co-opted by a mindset that would have ensured more of the same. There was no pressure put on Kerry to change, and he didn't. As a result, the antiwar movement collapsed, with no demonstrations and a strict allegiance to the Democrat's pro-war campaign.

Fortunately, the movement to end the war was resurrected by Cindy Sheehan as she erected her tent outside the Bush compound in Texas months later.

Today we find our political climate in a similar state of shock. Call it the "Nobody but Obama" epidemic. Senator Barack Obama has now sealed the Democratic nomination, and the usual suspects, from MoveOn.org to Progressive Democrats for America, are falling in line. Sadly, what seems to be reigning in this year's election is even worse than the storm that flooded our issues in 2004.

After eight dreadfully long years of

Bush, it is to be expected that a lot of voters would support any Democrat if it meant kicking the wretched Republicans out of the White House. Obama's message of "change" has certainly resonated well. But underlying his rhetoric is a brilliant public relations campaign, orchestrated by DC insiders, that is void of any real substance.

In 2006, the Democrats were ushered in to Congress with the expectation that they would end the war in Iraq. Democratic campaigns across the nation exploited the popular anti-Bush sentiment, promising that real "change" was on the horizon.

It's a familiar refrain indeed.

Rubber stamp

Two years later, we have nothing to show for it. The Democrats have controlled both houses of Congress, yet have rubber stamped virtually every Iraq war spending bill that has come down the pipeline – ensuring the bloodbath for years to come. All major Democrats have echoed the Bush line on Iran, promising a military confrontation if the country does not cease its nuclear experimentation. By and large, Bush's backward Middle East foreign policy has not been met any real opposition from the Hill.

Like the majority of his colleagues,

he Democrats have controlled both houses of Congress, yet have rubber stamped virtually every Iraq war spending bill that has come down the pipeline – ensuring the bloodbath for years to come

AFTER BUSH

I still believe that if Nader wanted to put real pressure on Obama and the Democrats this year he would focus his finite resources and energy on the states that matter most: Ohio and Florida

Obama has done very little to change the face of American politics. He has voted for war spending, appeased the pro-Israel lobby, and helped build the erroneous case against Iran, saying nothing about Israel's plentiful arsenal of nuclear warheads. In short, Barack Obama is not an ally to those of us who oppose the ambiguous War on Terror.

"I want you to know that today I'll be speaking from my heart, and as a true friend of Israel," Obama announced a day after he locked up his party's nomination to a crowd of pro-Israel zealots. "[W]hen I visit with AIPAC, I am among friends, Good friends. Friends who share my strong commitment to make sure that the bond between the United States and Israel is unbreakable today, tomorrow, and forever."

Yet here we are again, like 2004, with "progressives" and other lefties ogling a hope-filled candidacy. But it's not just Obama's war support that should raise our hackles.

Same old stuff

Obama supports the death penalty, opposes single-payer health care, supports nuclear energy, opposes a carbon pollution tax, supports the Cuba embargo, and will not end the vast array of federal subsidies to corporations, including those to the oil and gas cartel.

And as the United States economy slides into a deep recession, Barack Obama is promising more of the same, despite his criticism of John McCain's economic plan. But behind the curtains of Obama's strategy team is the same set of economic troglodytes intellectuals that led us in to our current financial disaster.

Obama's advisory team includes Harvard economist Jeffrey Liebman, a former Clinton adviser, who believes we ought

to privatize social security. Then we have the renowned David Cutler, another Harvardite, who believes our economy can be boosted through an increase in privatized health care costs. Writing for *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2006, Cutler explained, "The rising cost ... of health care has been the source of a lot of saber rattling in the media and the public square, without anyone seriously analyzing the benefits gained."

And that's just the tip of a very large iceberg.

Perhaps all of these issues are aiding the independent candidacy of Ralph Nader, who is consistently polling above 5% nationwide. This, despite a virtual media blackout and very little support among progressives.

Nader still faces many hurdles, from ballot access to fundraising, yet his support is higher at this point than it was at a similar stage during his 2000 Green Party bid. I still believe that if Nader wanted to put real pressure on Obama and the Democrats this year he would focus his finite resources and energy on the states that matter most: Ohio and Florida.

All in all, progressives and others working to bring about real change in this country, ought to escape from under the dark "Nobody but Obama" cloud that hover above. For his campaign, when it comes to the most pressing issues of the day, doesn't represent "change" and "hope" any more than does Senator McCain's. **CT**

*Joshua Frank is the author of **Left Out!** (Common Courage Press) and the co-editor, with Jeffrey St. Clair, of **Red State Rebels: Tales of Grassroots Resistance in the Heartland** (AK Press). Visit the new Red State Rebels website at www.RedStateRebels.org.*

No, I can't . . .

Uri Avnery cannot understand why presidential contenders are so obsequious and fawning when they get in front of the Israel lobby

After months of a tough and bitter race, a merciless struggle, Barack Obama has defeated his formidable opponent, Hillary Clinton. He has wrought a miracle: for the first time in history a black person has become a credible candidate for the presidency of the most powerful country in the world.

And what was the first thing he did after his astounding victory? He ran to the conference of the Israel lobby, AIPAC, and made a speech that broke all records for obsequiousness and fawning.

That is shocking enough. Even more shocking is the fact that nobody was shocked.

It was a triumphalist conference. Even this powerful organization had never seen anything like it. 7,000 Jewish functionaries from all over the United States came together to accept the obeisance of the entire Washington elite, which came to kowtow at their feet. All the three presidential hopefuls made speeches, trying to outdo each other in flattery. 300 Senators and Members of Congress crowded the hallways. Everybody who wants to be elected or reelected to any office, indeed everybody who has any political ambitions at all, came to see and be seen.

The Washington of AIPAC is like the Constantinople of the Byzantine emper-

ors in its heyday.

The world looked on and was filled with wonderment. The Israeli media were ecstatic. In all the world's capitals the events were followed closely and conclusions were drawn. All the Arab media reported on them extensively. Aljazeera devoted an hour to a discussion of the phenomenon.

The most extreme conclusions of professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt were confirmed in their entirety. The Israel Lobby stood at the center of political life in the US and the world at large. Why, actually? Why do the candidates for the American presidency believe that the Israel lobby is so absolutely essential to their being elected?

The Jewish votes are important, of course, especially in several swing states which may decide the outcome. But African-Americans have more votes, and so do the Hispanics. Obama has brought to the political scene millions of new young voters. Numerically, the Arab-Muslim community in the US is also not an insignificant factor.

Some say that Jewish money speaks. The Jews are rich. Perhaps they donate more than others for political causes. But the myth about all-powerful Jewish money has an anti-Semitic ring. After all, other lobbies, and most decidedly

Why do the candidates for the American presidency believe that the Israel lobby is so absolutely essential to their being elected?

AIPAC RULES

And here comes Obama to crawl in the dust at the feet of AIPAC and go out of his way to justify a policy that completely negates his own ideas

the huge multinational corporations, have given considerable sums of money to Obama (as well as to his opponents). And Obama himself has proudly announced that hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens have sent him small donations, which have amounted to tens of millions.

True, it has been proven that the Jewish lobby can almost always block the election of a senator or a member of Congress who does not dance – and do so with fervor – to the Israeli tune. In some exemplary cases (which were indeed meant to be seen as examples) the lobby has defeated popular politicians by lending its political and financial clout to the election campaign of a practically unknown rival.

But in a presidential race?

The transparent fawning of Obama on the Israel lobby stands out more than similar efforts by the other candidates.

Why? Because his dizzying success in the primaries was entirely due to his promise to bring about a change, to put an end to the rotten practices of Washington and to replace the old cynics with a young, brave person who does not compromise his principles.

And lo and behold, the very first thing he does after securing the nomination of his party is to compromise his principles. And how!

The outstanding thing that distinguishes him from both Hillary Clinton and John McCain is his uncompromising opposition to the war in Iraq from the very first moment. That was courageous. That was unpopular. That was totally opposed to the Israel lobby, all of whose branches were fervidly pushing George Bush to start the war that freed Israel from a hostile regime.

And here comes Obama to crawl in the dust at the feet of AIPAC and go out of his way to justify a policy that completely negates his own ideas.

OK he promises to safeguard Israel's

security at any cost. That is usual. OK he threatens darkly against Iran, even though he promised to meet their leaders and settle all problems peacefully. OK he promised to bring back our three captured soldiers (believing, mistakenly, that all three are held by Hizbullah – an error that shows, by the way, how sketchy is his knowledge of our affairs.)

But his declaration about Jerusalem breaks all bounds. It is no exaggeration to call it scandalous.

No transfer, no peace

No Palestinian, no Arab, no Muslim will make peace with Israel if the Haram-al-Sharif compound (also called the Temple Mount), one of the three holiest places of Islam and the most outstanding symbol of Palestinian nationalism, is not transferred to Palestinian sovereignty. That is one of the core issues of the conflict.

On that very issue, the Camp David conference of 2000 broke up, even though the then Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, was willing to divide Jerusalem in some manner.

Along comes Obama and retrieves from the junkyard the outworn slogan “Undivided Jerusalem, the Capital of Israel for all Eternity”. Since Camp David, all Israeli governments have understood that this mantra constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to any peace process. It has disappeared – quietly, almost secretly – from the arsenal of official slogans. Only the Israeli (and American-Jewish) Right sticks to it, and for the same reason: to smother at birth any chance for a peace that would necessitate the dismantling of the settlements.

In prior US presidential races, the pandering candidates thought that it was enough to promise that the US embassy would be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. After being elected, not one of the candidates ever did anything about this promise. All were persuaded by the State Department that it would harm basic

American interests.

Obama went much further. Quite possibly, this was only lip service and he was telling himself: OK, I must say this in order to get elected. After that, God is great.

But even so the fact cannot be ignored: the fear of AIPAC is so terrible, that even this candidate, who promises change in all matters, does not dare. In this matter he accepts the worst old-style Washington routine. He is prepared to sacrifice the most basic American interests. After all, the US has a vital interest in achieving an Israeli-Palestinian peace that will allow it to find ways to the hearts of the Arab masses from Iraq to Morocco. Obama has harmed his image in the Muslim world and mortgaged his future – if and when he is elected president.

Ascent to power

Sixty five years ago, American Jewry stood by helplessly while Nazi Germany exterminated their brothers and sisters in Europe. They were unable to prevail on President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to do anything significant to stop the Holocaust. (And at that same time, many Afro-Americans did not dare to go near the polling stations for fear of dogs being set on them.)

What has caused the dizzying ascent to power of the American Jewish establishment? Organizational talent? Money? Climbing the social ladder? Shame for their lack of zeal during the Holocaust?

The more I think about this wondrous phenomenon, the stronger becomes my conviction (about which I have already written in the past) that what really matters is the similarity between the American enterprise and the Zionist one, both in the spiritual and the practical sphere. Israel is a small America, the USA is a huge Israel.

The Mayflower passengers, much as the Zionists of the first and second aliya (immigration wave), fled from Europe,

carrying in their hearts a messianic vision, either religious or utopian. (True, the early Zionists were mostly atheists, but religious traditions had a powerful influence on their vision.) The founders of American society were “pilgrims”, the Zionists immigrants called themselves “olim” – short for olim beregel, pilgrims. Both sailed to a “promised land”, believing themselves to be God’s chosen people.

Both suffered a great deal in their new country. Both saw themselves as “pioneers”, who make the wilderness bloom, a “people without land in a land without people”. Both completely ignored the rights of the indigenous people, whom they considered sub-human savages and murderers. Both saw the natural resistance of the local peoples as evidence of their innate murderous character, which justified even the worst atrocities. Both expelled the natives and took possession of their land as the most natural thing to do, settling on every hill and under every tree, with one hand on the plow and the Bible in the other.

True, Israel did not commit anything approaching the genocide performed against the Native Americans, nor anything like the slavery that persisted for many generations in the US. But since the Americans have repressed these atrocities in their consciousness, there is nothing to prevent them from comparing themselves to the Israelis. It seems that in the unconscious mind of both nations there is a ferment of suppressed guilt feelings that express themselves in the denial of their past misdeeds, in aggressiveness and the worship of power.

How is it that a man like Obama, the son of an African father, identifies so completely with the actions of former generations of American whites? It shows again the power of a myth to become rooted in the consciousness of a person, so that he identifies 100% with the imagined national narrative. To this may be added

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AIPAC RULES

the unconscious urge to belong to the victors, if possible. Therefore, I do not accept without reservation the speculation: "Well, he must talk like this in order to get elected. Once in the White House, he will return to himself."

I am not so sure about that. It may well turn out that these things have a surprisingly strong hold on his mental world.

Of one thing I am certain: Obama's declarations at the AIPAC conference

are very, very bad for peace. And what is bad for peace is bad for Israel, bad for the world and bad for the Palestinian people.

If he sticks to them, once elected, he will be obliged to say, as far as peace between the two peoples of this country is concerned: "No, I can't!"

Uri Avnery is an Irgun veteran turned Israeli peace activist

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Can soccer stop the violence?

Dave Zirin tells why South Africa's foreign soccer stars are afraid to go out at night

The Boston Celtics have adopted the South African word ubuntu as a team slogan this season. It means unity, interconnectedness and literally, “we are who we are through others.” There is a terrible irony that ubuntu is currently being embraced in Boston while South Africa has recently seen a viral spread of ethnic violence – the utter negation of ubuntu. Black South Africans, living in terrible poverty, have killed nearly sixty people and driven tens of thousands from their homes for simply being foreigners.

If you were born in Mozambique or Zimbabwe, you live in danger of rape, robbery or murder. The roots of the violence lie in the country's crushing poverty and a dynamic all too familiar to Westerners, the scapegoating of immigrants. *Time* reports: “In November last year, the South African Institute of Race Relations estimated 4.2 million South Africans were living on \$1 a day in 2005, up from 1.9 million in 1996, two years after the end of apartheid. Globalization was supposed to be the tide to lift all boats, but the evidence in South Africa suggests that millions of boats are not merely missing the tide, they're in an entirely different ocean.”

Criticism has been widespread about the lack of response by South African,

not to mention Western, leaders. But there is an important, overlooked and – we can only pray – decisive tide of condemnation coming from that most global of sports, soccer. Soccer players in the African leagues often move from country to country in search of new challenges and better salaries. They are heroes on the continent, and many aren't willing to be silent.

Gilbert Mushangazike, a star striker from Zimbabwe who plays for South Africa's Orlando Pirates, said recently, “We are heroes when we score goals but we are people's enemies on the streets. Although I'm here legally, I'm so scared that I'm even afraid to walk on the streets or go visit my friends. This whole thing has affected me and many of my teammates. We are simply not taking this whole thing very well. We are all human beings and people must treat [us] with respect and dignity. There are many white foreigners out there but they are not attacked. It's a good thing that I'm flying out to Zimbabwe for national team duty because I don't know how I would survive, because I'm even scared to go shopping.”

Forty-two-year-old South African football legend John “Shoes” Moshoeu, was born in Soweto, where much of the violence has taken place. He still plays midfield for AmZulu. “Our African brothers

“We are heroes when we score goals but we are people's enemies on the streets. Although I'm here legally, I'm so scared that I'm even afraid to walk on the streets or go visit my friends”

INSIDE SOUTH AFRICA

“It is not good for us as Africans. We black South Africans were taught about the spirit of ubuntu when we grew up. The African brothers and sisters should be accommodative to each other”

and sisters should be living in this country freely without being attacked,” he said. “We should note that some of the illegal immigrants are in the country because of some corrupt officials at the Department of Home Affairs. Some of the police at the border gates are also corrupt and they let in these guys in exchange for money. The government should look at this issue holistically.”

Disturbing picture

Musa Otieno, a Kenyan-born player for Santos Cape Town, cannot believe the devolution that surrounds him. “I have been in this country for eleven years and I have never seen such acts on foreigners. My family is in South Africa and I pray that this does not affect my children at school. What has been happening has painted a disturbing picture about South Africa. When we should be embracing each other as African brothers and sisters we are killing each other.”

Despite the unquestionable cultural capital soccer players possess, there is a question over whether their message may fall on deaf ears.

That’s because there is a greater concern that links these worlds of global soccer and provincial violence: the 2010 World Cup, for the first time staged on the African Continent and taking place in – you guessed it – South Africa.

Cities such as Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg will be the nexus for thousands of foreign fans and dignitaries. Meanwhile, the building of five new mega-stadiums would, according to some South African politicians, “clear the slums by 2010.” *Le Monde Diplomatique* wrote in May about the World Cup preparations: “Construction – and corruption

– is booming. But almost none of the building or the money can be accessed by the poor who live in shantytowns without proper water, sanitation or electricity.” Housing prices in the twenty-first century have gone up 92 percent, while wages have risen a mere 8 percent. As slums are cleared, tensions will surely rise.”

Phil “Chippa” Masinga, former Bafana Bafana forward and 2010 World Cup ambassador, has expressed the fear that the violence may scuttle the World Cup altogether. “Our action could come back to haunt us in 2009 and 2010 when we host the Confederation Cup and the World Cup. People from outside the country will not want to come and attend these tournaments to avoid possible attacks on them.”

Says former Bafana Bafana linkman Teboho “Tebza Ngwana” Moloji: “It is not good for us as Africans. We black South Africans were taught about the spirit of ubuntu when we grew up. The African brothers and sisters should be accommodative to each other.”

Masinga may be correct, and the soccer stars are without question courageous in raising their voice against the senseless violence. But it sounds somewhat superficial to ask ubuntu from the poor, when the only ubuntu they see exists among South Africa’s post-apartheid elite. It’s an elite that demands they silently accept the demolition of their communities for the good of both the country as well as the World Cup. **CT**

*Dave Zirin is the author of the forthcoming **A People’s History of Sports in the United States** (The New Press). Contact him at edgeofsports@gmail.com.*

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Doomed reign of the toddler king

The America Way of Life is drawing to a close, and not a minute too soon, writes **Jason Miller**

Both George Bush and Dick Cheney have emphatically proclaimed the American Way of Life as “non-negotiable.” As hard as it may be for the feeble-minded, deluded, conscienceless, or hopelessly addicted to grasp, Mother Nature and billions of human beings are going to force us to the bargaining table. We can kick, scream, stomp our feet, and hold our breath all we want, but our abhorrent mode of existence is going down.

Aside from the fact that they are utterly unsustainable, why is it such a certainty that American Capitalism, consumerism, militarism, and the myriad associated ills that exist to maintain our obscene lifestyle are a house of cards on the verge of collapse?

Quite simple really. With our overwhelming wealth, power, and military firepower, the United States exercises virtual hegemony over the globe. Granted our influence is waning, but we still call most of the shots. As lord and master of the planet, we are doing a miserable job. We have a sense of entitlement that dwarfs Mt. Everest, we are absolutely certain that we are center of the universe, and we throw incredibly destructive tantrums when we don't get our way, the American Way that is. We are massive toddlers inflicting our version of the

“terrible twos” on the world. Were we not wielding such a massive cudgel, our childishness would be laughable.

Under our “good stewardship,” as our current unitary executive loves to call it, the world is careening down the highway at break-neck speed with an infant at the wheel.

And if he crashes before an adult can wrest control from him, we're looking at a major accident with multiple fatalities. We've already pushed the world to the verge of economic collapse, the brink of starvation, the initiation of perpetual war, and impending environmental disaster.

Collectively, we act without conscience or concern for the consequences of our actions. The American Way of Life is “all about me and to hell with everyone else.” We revere narcissism, hyper-individualism, greed, wealth, and status as virtues. Becoming a rich, acquisitive careerist by clawing one's way to the top of the hierarchy through deceit, betrayal, sycophancy, and whoring oneself out in any way imaginable is enshrined as the penultimate achievement in our sewer of a society.

Contrary to the common misconception, the psychological umbilical cord between our mothers and us is severed at a very young age. Nearly the instant we are able to intellectualize we drop mom

Through our addiction to pixilated images, the lords and masters of American Capitalism manipulate us into participating in the banality of evil without giving it a first thought, let alone a second one

FINAL THOUGHTS

TV is an incredibly multi-faceted tool that enables the ruling elites in the US to hone the masses into the infantilized little sociopaths they need to man the bulwarks of American Capitalism, spreading our “corporatocracy and freedom from the pangs of conscience and critical thought” the world over

like a hot potato and become psychically parasitic, our hosts being those ubiquitous devices known as televisions.

When we were in the womb, our mothers’ rich and nurturing blood flowed through our veins, quite literally providing the essence of our physical being. Fast forward a few years. Our psychic umbilical cord detaches from mom and is immediately seduced to fuse itself to that seemingly innocent yet deeply nefarious pusher of mind crack.

In stark contrast to our mother’s wholesome blood that nourished us in a way that ensured healthy physical growth, the rancid filth we derive from television cripples and malforms our psyches in profound and perverse ways.

Propaganda war

Planned or not, television has become the power elite’s primary weapon in the daily propaganda war they wage to maintain the American Way of Life, furiously beating down any and all challengers. Calling the content of television “programming” is quite fitting. .

TV is an incredibly multi-faceted tool that enables the ruling elites in the US to hone the masses into the infantilized little sociopaths they need to man the bulwarks of American Capitalism, spreading our “corporatocracy and freedom from the pangs of conscience and critical thought” the world over.

If you don’t know the stats, you’ve been somnambulating, but here are a few:

1. We are 5% of the population and siphon off 30% of the world’s goodies, while 35,000 people starve to death each day.
2. We, the land of the free, exercise a higher degree of social control than even those “tyrants” in China and Russia. We have the world’s largest prison population, many of whom are non-violent drug offenders. And then

there’s our clever way of imposing our agenda in Latin America via the “War on Drugs.....”

3. We lost about 500,000 people in WWII while Russia lost over 20 million yet we arrogantly boast that WE “defeated fascism.” And that’s not to mention the fact that many of our beloved capitalists, including members of the Bush dynasty, supported Hitler until they faced potential criminal prosecution.

4. We have staged coups and incursions the world over (our interventions are far too numerous to document in this dispatch, but visit this site to familiarize yourself with the reach of our malevolent imperialist tentacles: http://www.third-worldtraveler.com/Foreign_Policy/US_ForeignPolicy.html)

5. Ironically, we justify our trillion dollar a year military budget by waging wars against nations with phantom weapons of mass destruction—while we are the only nation to have deployed such weapons. Ask Japan about the devastating impact.

6. We pour billions of dollars into the support of those miserable Zionist squatters in Palestine because a very small percentage of our population (which has very deep pockets, a strangle-hold on mass media, and a juggernaut lobbying organization) has many of us brain-washed into believing “poor little Israel” is fighting for its very existence – when the reality is that it has a more formidable military than all of its alleged threats combined and has ruthlessly brutalized the Palestinians like the terrorist state that it is.

7. We slaughtered over two million

Vietnamese in an attempt to keep the world safe for capitalism and are poised to consider putting one of the perpetrators in the White House.

8. We have murdered untold millions of Iraqis since the Gulf War via invasion, brutal economic sanctions, fomenting civil war and chaos, illegal occupation, and destruction of infrastructure. And neither of the performers in the theater of the absurd we call a “presidential election” has promised to bring an immediate end to this moral and legal abomination. If we enforced the Nuremberg Laws that WE crafted, all responsible would be hanged, including whoever replaces Bush and perpetuates this genocide.

And that is just a brief and very incomplete summary of the evil that we openly or tacitly support simply by being Americans, even if our role is very banal or pedestrian. As cogs in a murderous machine built on stolen land and primarily with the blood, sweat and tears of slaves and poor immigrants, we all bear a degree of responsibility for the atrocities we commit. Even those who choose to remain and fight the system from within are still buttressing the American Way to some extent.

Blissful ignorance

How do we sleep at night? Some of us don’t and some of us have pharmaceutical help. But by and large our television programming has given us the “gifts” of a pathologically muted conscience, heavy doses of blissful ignorance, and the attention span of anencephalic sheep.

Desensitized to violence, mentally malnourished by a steady diet of brain

candy, conditioned to putting our brains in neutral and letting the “idiot box” do our thinking for us, psychologically beaten down by constant reminders that the subjects of our idolatry are “better than us,” and manipulated into believing that the spiritually vacuous American Dream is more than just a mirage that keeps the working class trudging through the desert of perpetual corporatism, many of us remain true believers, prefer wage slavery to sleeping under a bridge, or recognize that (despite the shop-worn and inane rhetoric about freedom and democracy) the system has harsh consequences for those who don’t at least ostensibly toe the line.

Regardless of our individual level of consciousness or level of participation in this criminal enterprise known in some circles as the American Empire, we Americans as a collective are an intriguingly repulsive synthesis of excessively spoiled brats and sociopaths. We want what we want when we want it, consequences be damned. We have the means to get what we desire, virtually no capacity to delay gratification, and the ability to punish those who stand in our way. To top it off, we don’t let trivialities like conscience restrain us. We are a nation of sociobrats.

Individually, we can change. Many have transformed and many more will. But there are some pretty long odds against enough of us shedding our grotesquely malformed psyches and evolving beyond our state of infantilization before the American Way of Life collapses under the weight of its own excrement or is eradicated by its hordes of victims. **CT**

Jason Miller is the associate editor of Cyrano’s Journal Online.

We have the means to get what we desire, virtually no capacity to delay gratification, and the ability to punish those who stand in our way

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