

INSIDE: SECRETS IN ISRAEL'S ARCHIVES ● TOWERING LUNACY ● A PERFECT STORM FOR PROPAGANDA ● BUSH'D AGAIN ● A SPEECH FOR ENDLESS WAR

The ^{ColdType} READER

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ON THE BEACH

Switch off the TV cameras. Bring the reporters home. The Gulf oil crisis is officially over. But is it, really?

The ^{ColdType} READER



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COVER PHOTO: Jess Hurd – A wader feeding on the oily beach at Grand Isle, Louisiana, after the BP oil spill.

We're marching to intolerance

The French are deporting Roma, Americans are furious about a mosque, and **Michael I. Niman** is angry

Things aren't looking too good on the tolerance front lately. In a move darkly reminiscent of the European pogroms of the 1930s, France's beleaguered right-wing president, Nicolas Sarkozy, is ordering mass deportations of ethnic Roma. Like Europe's Jews, who were a minority in every European country before the Holocaust and a majority in none, the Roma are present across the continent as an oppressed minority without an independent homeland. And like the Jews, they were also rounded up by racist governments and sent to concentration camps during the Holocaust. So it's not too much of a stretch to say someone hit the replay button here. Sarkozy's government is borrowing one of the oldest scripts from the playbook, tossing raw meat to the xenophobes by scapegoating a minority, all in order to distract the public from his own government's failings.

The Roma certainly make for an easy target. Most of the world knows them only by the racial slur "gypsies," which is so common that Roma themselves sometimes have been forced to use the term to avoid confusion when talking to an ignorant majority. The "G" word is like the "N" word, only much more popular – so popular, in fact, that the United States' largest news service, the Associated Press, headlined their Sarkozy-friendly article last month:

"France to Repatriate 93 Gypsies to Romania." "The flights," the AP article continues, "are part of a crackdown by France's conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy," who "has linked Gypsies, or Roma, to crime and spearheaded a campaign to dismantle their illegal camps and send some home to Eastern Europe."

If you're feeling a bit smug, thinking maybe us Americans, minus perhaps the AP, are somehow above the amnesiac French, you might want to take a gander at our own nation's own metastasizing "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy. Having trumped catastrophic climate change, the BP oil spill, and all news coverage of pet torturers, this fabricated controversy is emerging at the center of the 2010 Republican election strategy. Muslims, like the Roma in France, are fair game, so the media is plugging away with polls, idiot-on-the-street interviews, and all sorts of intellectual gasoline to fan the flames of this season's hottest non-story story.

Of course it's not exactly a mosque, and it's not exactly at Ground Zero, but hey, it's not exactly a news story, either – then again it seems to be becoming one. The proposed building is actually a 13-story structure with a community pool, a gym and fitness center, a 500-seat auditorium and theater, and a prayer space, which we'll call a "mosque." It would be two blocks over

Most of the world knows them only by the racial slur "gypsies," which is so common that Roma themselves sometimes have been forced to use the term to avoid confusion when talking to an ignorant majority

HATE MONGERS

This was too much even for the normally fire-breathing Pat Buchanan, who attacked Gingrich for being a “political opportunist”

from the edge of the World Trade Center site, and would contain the neighborhood’s third mosque, with the other two being four and 12 blocks away. Houses of worship and cultural centers aren’t really anything new in lower Manhattan. For example, St. Paul’s Chapel and St. Peter’s Church are both less than one block from Ground Zero, the John Street Methodist Church and the Battery Park Synagogue are both one block away, Trinity Church is two blocks away, as is the Amish Market, as would be the new Islamic center. The Museum of Jewish Heritage is five blocks away. You get the idea. There’s nothing novel here.

But non-issues like this always bring out our own loony, native-born Sarkozys. Seemingly back from the dead, we have former Republican House Speaker Newt (as in the insect-eating amphibian who’s comfy both wallowing in the mud and slithering on dry ground) Gingrich. He’s found a ready and willing media machine to disseminate his bile. This “family values” adulterer who sprang divorce papers on his wife as she lay on a hospital bed recovering from cancer surgery recently argued, “Nazis don’t have the right to put up a sign next to the Holocaust Museum in Washington,” as if such an abomination would be analogous to American Muslims constructing a community center in lower Manhattan.

He went on to explain that President Barack Obama, a former constitutional attorney, in explaining that an Islamic organization has a legally protected right to construct a community center on its private property, a concept that like family values is a cornerstone of Republican identity,

was actually “pandering to radical Islam.” This was too much even for the normally fire-breathing Pat Buchanan, who attacked Gingrich for being a “political opportunist.” Perhaps Newt’s courting the loonier-than-Palin vote.

Carl’s madmen

But it gets better. Buffalo, NY, developer Carl Paladino, now a contender for the Republican nomination for New York governor, is also grandstanding on the issue, apparently courting the loonier-than-Newt vote. According to Paladino, “This isn’t about moderate, peace-loving Muslims; this is about a sect of radical fundamentalist Islamists who attacked our nation and who are tied to this mosque by an ideology of hate... This is the same ideology that advocates stoning women and gay people to death.”

Okay. So Paladino doesn’t want to stone women to death, but that’s about as liberal as he gets on the gender front. This is the same Carl Paladino who was distributing internet bestiality pornography to his email circle, including a rather explicit photo of a horse penetrating a woman’s vagina.

The gubernatorial hopeful, a darling of New York’s Tea Party, defended himself, explaining to the *Buffalo News* that he only sent the bestiality pornography to “a very specific bunch of friends.” No biggie – just guy fun. It seems that Paladino either really likes horses or he really hates women, or perhaps both.

Another Paladino email contained a photo of a plane about to crash on a group of running black children, with the caption, “Run Nigger, Run.” This also, no doubt,

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

went to a very specific group of friends.

These misogynist and racist emails were made public early in the campaign, when Paladino was relatively unknown across the state. Rather than kill his fledging candidacy, the scandal seems to have ignited it. Hell, everyone sends that sort of stuff to a very specific group of friends, folks said. Carl's just a victim of the liberal media.

Today that same media has all but forgotten about Carl the racist bestiality fetishist, and regrooved him into Paladino the populist. Not a madman, but a man with a message. And hence, in this better-than-France country of ours, suddenly thousands of other madmen are peppering their dandelion-free lawns with "I'm Mad Too Carl" signs. Make of it what you will.

Of course we shouldn't easily dismiss Paladino and the loonier-than-Newt crowd as just being good for a few hoots. They might very well have some staying power, at least in the Republican party. A recent Pew poll found that a full 18 percent of Americans, and 41 percent of Republicans, now believe that the Hawaiian-born Obama was either "probably" or "definitely" born in a foreign country. As for his birth certificate? Well, the Kenyans put it there in Honolulu back in 1961, knowing their sleeper agent would one day dupe the country into electing him president. **CT**

Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and media studies at Buffalo State College, New York

Diversity is a thin veneer under which any bigot who supports corporate tax cuts can get a pass

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitz



Things that won't go away

William Blum on some of the things the US government and media just won't let go of

No matter ...
drum roll, please
... Stand tall
American GI
hero! And don't
even think of ever
apologizing

"They're leaving as heroes. I want them to walk home with pride in their hearts," declared Col. John Norris, the head of a US Army brigade in Iraq.

It's enough to bring tears to the eyes of an American, enough to make him choke up. Enough to make him forget. But no American should be allowed to forget that the nation of Iraq, the society of Iraq, have been destroyed, ruined, a failed state. The Americans, beginning 1991, bombed for 12 years, with one excuse or another; then invaded, then occupied, overthrew the government, killed wantonly, tortured ... the people of that unhappy land have lost everything – their homes, their schools, their electricity, their clean water, their environment, their neighborhoods, their mosques, their archaeology, their jobs, their careers, their professionals, their state-run enterprises, their physical health, their mental health, their health care, their welfare state, their women's rights, their religious tolerance, their safety, their security, their children, their parents, their past, their present, their future, their lives ... More than half the population either dead, wounded, traumatized, in prison, internally displaced, or in foreign exile ... The air, soil, water, blood and genes drenched with depleted uranium ... the most awful birth defects ... unexploded cluster bombs lie in wait for children to

pick them up ... an army of young Islamic men went to Iraq to fight the American invaders; they left the country more militant, hardened by war, to spread across the Middle East, Europe and Central Asia ... a river of blood runs alongside the Euphrates and Tigris ... through a country that may never be put back together again.

"It is a common refrain among war-weary Iraqis that things were better before the US-led invasion in 2003," reported the *Washington Post* on May 5, 2007.

No matter ... drum roll, please ... Stand tall American GI hero! And don't even think of ever apologizing. Iraq is forced by the United States to continue paying reparations for its own invasion of Kuwait in 1990. How much will the American heroes pay the people of Iraq?

"Unhappy the land that has no heroes ... No. Unhappy the land that needs heroes." – Bertolt Brecht, Life of Galileo

"What we need to discover in the social realm is the moral equivalent of war; something heroic that will speak to men as universally as war does, and yet will be as compatible with their spiritual selves as war has proved to be incompatible." – William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience

Perhaps the groundwork for that heroism

already exists ... February 15, 2003, a month before the US invasion of Iraq, probably the largest protest in human history, between six and ten million protesters took to the streets of some 800 cities in nearly sixty countries across the globe.

Iraq. Love it or leave it.

PanAm 103

The British government recently warned Libya against celebrating the one-year anniversary of Scotland's release of Abdel Baset al-Megrahi, the Libyan who's the only person ever convicted of the 1988 blowing up of PanAm flight 103 over Scotland, which took the lives of 270 largely Americans and British. Britain's Foreign Office has declared: "On this anniversary we understand the continuing anguish that al-Megrahi's release has caused his victims both in the U.K. and the US He was convicted for the worst act of terrorism in British history. Any celebration of al-Megrahi's release would be tasteless, offensive and deeply insensitive to the victims' families."

John Brennan, President Obama's counter-terrorism adviser, stated that the United States has "expressed our strong conviction" to Scottish officials that Megrahi should not remain free. Brennan criticized what he termed the "unfortunate and inappropriate and wrong decision" to allow Megrahi's return to Libya on compassionate grounds on Aug. 20, 2009 because he had cancer and was not expected to live more than about three months. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued a statement saying that the United States "continues to categorically disagree" with Scotland's decision to release Megrahi a year ago. "As we have expressed repeatedly to Scottish authorities, we maintain that Megrahi should serve out the entirety of his sentence in prison in Scotland." The US Senate has called for an investigation and family members of the crash victims have demanded that Megrahi's medical records be released. The Libyan's failure to die as promised has upset many people.

But how many of our wonderful leaders

are upset that Abdel Baset al-Megrahi spent eight years in prison despite the fact that there was, and is, no evidence that he had anything to do with the bombing of flight 103? The Scottish court that convicted him knew he was innocent. To understand that just read their 2001 "Opinion of the Court", or read my analysis of it at killinghope.org/bblum6/panam.htm.

As to the British government being so upset about Libya celebrating Megrahi's release - keeping in mind that it strongly appears that UK oil deals with Libya played more of a role in his release than his medical condition did - we should remember that in July 1988 an American Navy ship in the Persian Gulf, the Vincennes, shot down an Iranian passenger plane, taking the lives of 290 people; i.e., more than died from flight 103. And while the Iranian people mourned their lost loved ones, the United States celebrated by handing out medals and ribbons to the captain and crew of the Vincennes. The shootdown had another consequence: It inspired Iran to take revenge, which it did in December of that year, financing the operation to blow up PanAm 103 (carried out by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command).

Why do they hate us?

Passions are flying all over the place concerning the proposed building of an Islamic cultural center and mosque two blocks from 9/11 Ground Zero in New York. Even people who are not particularly anti-Muslim think it would be in bad taste, offensive. But implicit in all the hostility is the idea that what happened on that fateful day in 2001 was a religious act, fanatic Muslims acting as Muslims attacking infidels. However - even if one accepts the official government version of 19 Muslims hijacking four airliners - the question remains: Why did they choose the targets they chose? If they wanted to kill lots of American infidels why not fly the planes into the stands of packed football or baseball stadiums in the midwest or the south? Certainly a lot less protected than the Pentagon or the

he US Senate has called for an investigation and family members of the crash victims have demanded that Megrahi's medical records be released. The Libyan's failure to die as promised has upset many people

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Somehow, American leaders have to learn that their country is not exempt from history, that their actions have consequences

financial center of downtown Manhattan. Why did they choose symbols of US military might and imperialism? Because it was not a religious act, it was a political act. It was revenge for decades of American political and military abuse in the Middle East. It works the same all over the world. In the period of the 1950s to the 1980s in Latin America, in response to continuous hateful policies of Washington, there were countless acts of terrorism against American diplomatic and military targets as well as the offices of US corporations; nothing to do with religion.

Somehow, American leaders have to learn that their country is not exempt from history, that their actions have consequences.

Afghanistan

In their need to defend the US occupation of Afghanistan, many Americans have cited the severe oppression of women in that desperate land and would have you believe that the United States is the last great hope of those poor ladies. However, in the 1980s the United States played an indispensable role in the overthrow of a secular and relatively progressive Afghan government, one which endeavored to grant women much more freedom than they'll ever have under the current government, more perhaps than ever again. Here are some excerpts from a 1986 US Army manual on Afghanistan discussing the policies of this government concerning women: "provisions of complete freedom of choice of marriage partner, and fixation of the minimum age at marriage at 16 for women and 18 for men"; "abolished forced marriages"; "bring [women] out of seclusion, and initiate social programs"; "extensive literacy programs, especially for women"; "putting girls and boys in the same classroom"; "concerned with changing gender roles and giving women a more active role in politics".

The overthrow of this government paved the way for the coming to power of an Islamic fundamentalist regime, followed by the awful Taliban. And why did the United States in its infinite wisdom choose to do such a thing? Mainly because the Afghan government was

allied with the Soviet Union and Washington wanted to draw the Russians into a hopeless military quagmire – "We now have the opportunity of giving to the Soviet Union its Vietnam War", said Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Adviser.

The women of Afghanistan will never know how the campaign to raise them to the status of full human beings would have turned out, but this, some might argue, is but a small price to pay for a marvelous Cold War victory.

Cuba

Why does the mainstream media routinely refer to Cuba as a dictatorship? Why is it not uncommon even for people on the left to do the same? I think that many of the latter do so in the belief that to say otherwise runs the risk of not being taken seriously, largely a vestige of the Cold War when Communists all over the world were ridiculed for following Moscow's party line. But what does Cuba do or lack that makes it a dictatorship? No "free press"? Apart from the question of how free Western media is, if that's to be the standard, what would happen if Cuba announced that from now on anyone in the country could own any kind of media? How long would it be before CIA money – secret and unlimited CIA money financing all kinds of fronts in Cuba – would own or control most of the media worth owning or controlling?

Is it "free elections" that Cuba lacks? They regularly have elections at municipal, regional and national levels. Money plays virtually no role in these elections; neither does party politics, including the Communist Party, since candidates run as individuals.⁷ Again, what is the standard by which Cuban elections are to be judged? Most Americans, if they gave it any thought, might find it difficult to even imagine what a free and democratic election, without great concentrations of corporate money, would look like, or how it would operate. Would Ralph Nader finally be able to get on all 50 state ballots, take part in national television debates, and be able to match the two monopoly parties in me-

dia advertising? If that were the case, I think he'd probably win; and that's why it's not the case. Or perhaps what Cuba lacks is our marvelous "electoral college" system, where the presidential candidate with the most votes is not necessarily the winner. If we really think this system is a good example of democracy why don't we use it for local and state elections as well?

Is Cuba a dictatorship because it arrests dissidents? Thousands of anti-war and other protesters have been arrested in the United States in recent years, as in every period in American history. Many have been beaten by police and mistreated while incarcerated. And remember: The United States is to the Cuban government like al Qaeda is to Washington, only much more powerful and much closer. Since the Cuban revolution, the United States and anti-Castro Cuban exiles in the US have inflicted upon Cuba greater damage and greater loss of life than what happened in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. (This is documented by Cuba in a 1999 suit against the United States detailing \$181.1 billion in compensation for victims: the death of 3,478 Cubans and the wounding or disabling of 2,099 others. The Cuban suit has been in the hands of the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the United Nations since 2001, a committee made up of all 15 members of the Security Council, which of course includes the United States, and which may account for the inaction on the matter.)

Cuban dissidents have had very close political and financial connections to American government agents. Would the US government ignore a group of Americans receiving funds from al Qaeda and engaging in repeated meetings with known members of that organization? In recent years the United States has arrested a great many people in the US and abroad solely on the basis of alleged ties to al Qaeda, with a lot less evidence to go by than Cuba has had with its dissidents' ties to the United States. Virtually all of Cuba's "political prisoners" are such dissidents. While others may call Cuba's security policies dictatorship, I call it self-defense.

The terrorist list

As casually and as routinely as calling Cuba a dictatorship, the mainstream media drops the line into news stories that "Hezbollah [or Hamas, or FARC, etc.] is considered a terrorist group by the United States", stated as matter-of-factly as saying that Hezbollah is located in Lebanon. Inclusion on the list limits an organization in various ways, such as its ability to raise funds and travel internationally. And inclusion is scarcely more than a political decision made by the US government. Who is put on or left off the State Department's terrorist list bears a strong relation to how supportive of US or Israeli policies the group is. The list never includes any of the anti-Castro Cuban groups or individuals in Florida although those people have carried out hundreds of terrorist acts over the past few decades, in Latin America, in the US, and in Europe. As you read this, the two men responsible for blowing up a Cuban airline in 1976, taking 73 lives, Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada, are free in the Florida sunshine. Imagine that Osama bin Laden was walking freely around the Streets of an Afghan or Pakistan city taking part in political demonstrations as Posada does in Florida. Venezuela asked the United States to extradite Posada five years ago and is still waiting.

Bosch and Posada are two of hundreds of Latin-American terrorists who've been given haven in the US over the years. Various administrations, both Democrat and Republican, have provided support of terrorists in Kosovo, Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere, including those with known connections to al Qaeda. Yet, in the State Department sit learned men who list Cuba as a "state sponsor of terrorism", along with Syria, Sudan and Iran. That's the complete list.

Meanwhile, five Cubans sent to Miami to monitor the anti-Castro terrorists are in their 12th year in US prisons. The Cuban government made the error of turning over to the FBI evidence of terrorist activities gathered by the five. Instead of arresting the terrorists, the FBI arrested the five Cubans (sic). **CT**

Would the US government ignore a group of Americans receiving funds from al Qaeda and engaging in repeated meetings with known members of that organization?

William Blum
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Switch off the TV cameras. Bring the reporters home. The Gulf oil crisis is officially over. But is it, really?

ON THE BEACH

PHOTOS: JESS HURD. WORDS: TONY SUTTON

That's it then. The oil spill crisis that began when an explosion on BP's Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20 killed 11 workers and released five billion gallons of crude oil into the sea is now officially over.

The leak is fixed, the oil dispersed, the danger averted – and BP will pay for the clean-up, said a relieved President Obama on June 15 after the well was capped following two months of media-stoked fears of an oily Armageddon.

BP, however, wasn't taking chances on getting stuck with the whole bill for the fiasco, despite promises made by ousted boss Tony Hayward as the mesmerised world watched eerie TV images of oil gushing from the broken well on the sea bed. After tripling their corporate adspend to nearly \$100 million between April and July, the company issued a 234-page report on Sept 8, that deflected much of the blame to their partners, drilling rig owner Transocean and Halliburton,



The sand still looks gold and beckoning, but the Mississippi Bay's St Louis beach is closed after the BP Gulf oil disaster.

JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK

JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK



Who's to blame? Obama and BP are the targets of protest signs erected in the areas most affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill

PHOTO ESSAY



JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK

Lafitte oil response team, dressed in inadequate protective clothing, cleans oil booms at Grand Isle beach in Louisiana.

which was responsible for cement work at the well bottom.

By this time, however, the media had forgotten what the fuss was about and had turned their attention-deficit gaze to more pressing issues, such as the building of a mosque near New York's Ground Zero.

Their earlier panic was dismissed at a stroke by a well-briefed Associated Press reporter who, breathlessly asked, soon after Obama's announcement, "With BP's broken well in the Gulf of Mexico finally capped, the focus shifts to the surface clean-up and the question on everyone's lips is: where is all the oil?"

"Open your eyes" was the collective response from the crime scene – five



JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK

Victims of the contamination. Dead fish are washed ashore at Dauphin Island, Alabama.

JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK



Donny and Angel Mastler, victims of the BP Gulf Oil disaster, with symptoms of chemical poisoning. Dauphin Island, Alabama.



JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK

Pelican on an oil covered containment boom at Grand Isle, Louisiana, after the oil spill.



JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK

Oil dispersant, Corexit washes up as foam on Grand Isle beach, Louisiana.

PHOTO ESSAY



JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK

Holidaymakers return to Pensacola Beach after Barack Obama declares it ‘open for business’ after the Gulf oil disaster, even though tar balls, oil and dispersant are washing up every day.

billion gallons of crude doesn't just vanish into thin air, except in the fevered dreams of oil company flacks.

So, it was no great surprise when, despite the efforts of BP, the US Government and the mainstream media to sound the ‘all clear’, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) in Massachusetts produced the first independent peer reviewed scientific study of the spill, contradicting claims that what little oil remains is disappearing when it said a vast underwater plume of toxins is stretching out from the well.

Suggestions that the majority of the oil had gone were also challenged at a congressional hearing which heard that BP's liberal use of the highly toxic Corexit dispersant had broken the oil into less visible forms, the combination of which is now washing up on the beaches.

Yes, it's business as usual – we've been here before – drill, destroy, deny, turn on the advertising and public relations spigots, spin the media, fix the



JESS HURD, REPORTDIGITA.CO.UK

Seagulls and plovers feed on dead fish pulled from the sea in Pass Christia, Mississippi.

mess as quickly and cheaply as possible, declare the emergency over, then start all over again. Look out, Arctic, here we come.

Meanwhile, the oil is still lurking below the water, beneath the pristine sand, fouling waterways, contaminating everything, while millions of unsuspecting birds are migrating from Canada to the Gulf's

oily marshes and islets, and thousands of displaced fishermen and bankrupted businesses are anxiously wondering when, if ever, they will see any compensation. They remember, even if the media doesn't, that 21 years after the Exxon Valdez disaster in Alaska, 8,000 residents of Prince William Sound have died awaiting compensation.. **CT**



Sometimes prayer seems the only answer.

Bush'd again?

Greg Palast revisits New Orleans five years after Katrina and pins the blame on a deadly project of the Army Corps of Engineers

MR-GO was undoubtedly the most bone-headed, deadly insane project ever built by the Army Corps of Engineers

Five years ago last month, a beast drowned New Orleans. Don't blame Katrina: the lady never, in fact, touched the city. The hurricane swept east of it.

You want to know the name of the S.O.B. who attacked New Orleans? Locals call him "Mr. Go" – the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet (MR-GO).

MR-GO was undoubtedly the most bone-headed, deadly insane project ever built by the Army Corps of Engineers. It's a 76-mile long canal, straight as a gun barrel, running right up from the Gulf of Mexico to the heart of New Orleans.

In effect, MR-GO was a welcome mat to the city for Katrina. Experts call it "the Hurricane Highway."

Until the Army Corps made this crazy gash in the Mississippi Delta fifty years ago, Mother Nature protected the Crescent City with a green wreath of cypress and mangrove. The environmental slash-job caused the government's own hydrologist to raise alarms from Day One of construction.

Unless MR-GO was fixed or plugged, the Corps was inviting, "the possibility of catastrophic damage to urban areas by a hurricane surge coming up this waterway." (I'm quoting from a report issued 17 years before The Flood.)

A forensic analysis by Dr. John W. Day calculated that if the Corps had left just six

miles of wetlands in place of the open canal, the surge caused by Katrina's wind would have been reduced by 4.5 feet and a lot of New Orleanians would be alive today.

The Corps plugging its ears to the warnings was nothing less than "negligence, insouciance, myopia and shortsightedness."

That list of fancy epithets poured from the angry pen of Federal Judge Stanwood Duval who heard the evidence in a suit filed by the surviving residents of the Ninth Ward and St. Bernard's Parish. His Honor ruled that the drowning of the Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish was a man-made disaster.

"The Corp's lassitude and failure to fulfill its duties resulted in a catastrophic loss of human life and property in unprecedented proportions."

In November 2009, Judge Duval ordered the federal government to pay to rebuild homes, and compensate families of the dead. The day Duval issued his verdict, I wrote in my notebook, "Barack Obama has before him a choice to make, one that will reveal the soul of his Presidency more than his choice of troop levels in Afghanistan: whether he will compensate the families who lost all they ever had, or appeal the court's decision, and thereby 'Bush' New Orleans once again."

But President Hope said 'Nope.' As the fifth anniversary of the drowning of the city approached, Obama's Attorney General Eric

Holder flat out refused payment and filed a notice of appeal.

It was George W. Bush who gave the middle finger to the victims of the Corps' cruel negligence and fought the claims for compensation. Now, Obama has made Bush's pitiless renunciation of New Orleans his own policy just as Obama turned Bush's war in Afghanistan into his own

In fact, other presidents have said, we owe, we pay.

In 1974, President Gerald Ford ordered payment to the victims of the collapse of the Army Corps' poorly built Teton Dam, Idaho, saying, "No government has the power to eliminate tragedy from human experience, but government can and government should act quickly to minimize the pain of a great disaster. Today, I am signing a bill which provides legislative authority for the compensation of personal and property damage sustained by the victims of the flood."

Jerry Ford!

Then, in 1994, after sea barriers built by the Army Corps failed in a storm washing away homes in Westhampton Dunes, New York, the Clinton Administration paid to rebuild every one of the \$3 million mansions. Not only that: To insure that the hedge-fund sharks and media moguls in this wealthy Hamptons resort wouldn't get their beach blankets wet, the feds paid an extra \$25 million for sand to recreate the beachfront.

But the Ninth Ward isn't the Hamptons, is it?

The facts are undeniable; even the government accepts that MR-GO threatened New Orleans. Congress has ordered the Army Corps to dump nearly half a million tons of rock into MR-GO to shut the damn thing. Still, the Administration drags its feet on payment under the legal theory of "Discretionary Function." In lay terms, that means, "Nyah, nyah, nyah! You can't hold the Army Corps responsible for gross negligence." The Justice Department also argued that the court should not consider the number of people drowned. Ugh.

Judge Duval slapped away the government's cockamamie defense.

So then, Why oh why oh why would Obama, after his grandstanding about BP's responsibility to the people of the Gulf Coast, refuse to compensate some of the same people for the far greater damage caused by the Corps? Let me tell you: it goes beyond the money. To "make things right" means Obama would have to face down powers fiercer than any Taliban: Big Oil.

The widening of Mr. Go drowned New Orleans; it was not an Act of God. It was an Act of Chevron. An Act of Shell Oil. And, yes, an Act of BP. The Army Corps admitted that it used its "discretion" to put shipping above safety. The choice was made to help the Gulf oil giants move their crude.

I talked with Jonathan Andry yesterday, the litigator for the Katrina survivors. Obama's decision to appeal the verdict really set him off. "We gave \$185 billion to AIG to pay off crooks. I represent people who lost their lives, their family homes, their jobs in one day."

He seemed far more upset than I expected from an experienced litigator. On a hunch, I said, "Did you lose your own home?"

Andry was quieter. "Evacuated in one car with four kids, three cats, one dog and one wife to Faraday." And they never came back. The home on Lake Pontchartrain, in the family for generations, was washed away. Just dirt there now.

Ever the reporter, I asked if he'd taken a photo of it. "Can't look. Too painful."

I think back to the river city where I once worked, where my own kids played and where I fell in love; and then I look at my President cowering behind his "discretionary function," and I too find that what I see is much too painful. **CT**

Greg Palast's film, Big Easy to Big Empty: The Untold Story of the Drowning of New Orleans was created for Democracy Now! and LinkTV.

This report was originally published at huffingtonpost.com

The widening of Mr. Go drowned New Orleans; it was not an Act of God. It was an Act of Chevron. An Act of Shell Oil. And, yes, an Act of BP

A speech for endless war

Obama's 'we'll-end-the-war-and-fix-the-economy' speech was nothing of the kind, writes **Norman Solomon**,

With his commitment to war in Afghanistan, President Obama is not only on the wrong side of history. He is also now propagating an exculpatory view of any and all US war efforts

On the last night of August, the president used an Oval Office speech to boost a policy of perpetual war.

Hours later, the *New York Times* front page offered a credulous gloss for the end of "the seven-year American combat mission in Iraq." The first sentence of the coverage described the speech as saying "that it is now time to turn to pressing problems at home." The story went on to assert that Obama "used the moment to emphasize that he sees his primary job as addressing the weak economy and other domestic issues – and to make clear that he intends to begin disengaging from the war in Afghanistan next summer."

But the speech gave no real indication of a shift in priorities from making war to creating jobs. And the oratory "made clear" only the repetition of vague vows to "begin" disengaging from the Afghanistan war next summer. In fact, top administration officials have been signaling that only token military withdrawals are apt to occur in mid-2011, and Obama said nothing to the contrary.

While now trumpeting the nobility of an Iraq war effort that he'd initially disparaged as "dumb," Barack Obama is polishing a halo over the Afghanistan war, which he touts as very smart. In the process, the Oval Office speech declared that every US war – no matter how mendacious or horrific – is

worthy of veneration.

Obama closed the speech with a tribute to "an unbroken line of heroes" stretching "from Khe Sanh to Kandahar – Americans who have fought to see that the lives of our children are better than our own." His reference to the famous US military outpost in South Vietnam was a chilling expression of affinity for another march of folly.

With his commitment to war in Afghanistan, President Obama is not only on the wrong side of history. He is also now propagating an exculpatory view of any and all US war efforts – as if the immoral can become the magnificent by virtue of patriotic alchemy.

A century ago, William Dean Howells wrote: "What a thing it is to have a country that can't be wrong, but if it is, is right, anyway!"

During the presidency of George W. Bush, "the war on terror" served as a rationale for establishing warfare as a perennial necessity. The Obama administration may have shelved the phrase, but the basic underlying rationales are firmly in place. With American troop levels in Afghanistan near 100,000, top US officials are ramping up rhetoric about "taking the fight to" the evildoers.

The day before the Oval Office speech, presidential spokesman Robert Gibbs talked to reporters about "what this drawdown

means to our national security efforts in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia and around the world as we take the fight to Al Qaeda.”

The next morning, Obama declared at Fort Bliss: “A lot of families are now being touched in Afghanistan. We’ve seen casualties go up because we’re taking the fight to Al Qaeda and the Taliban and their allies.” And, for good measure, Obama added that “now, under the command of Gen. Petraeus, we have the troops who are there in a position to start taking the fight to the terrorists.”

If, nine years after 9/11, we are supposed to believe that US forces can now “start” taking the fight to “the terrorists,” this is truly war without end. And that’s the idea.

Nearly eight years ago, in November 2002, retired US Army Gen. William Odom appeared on C-SPAN’s Washington Journal program and told viewers: “Terrorism is not an enemy. It cannot be defeated. It’s a tactic. It’s about as sensible to say we declare war on night attacks and expect we’re going to win that war. We’re not going to win the war on terrorism.”

With his Aug. 31 speech, Obama became explicit about the relationship between reduced troop levels in Iraq and escalation in Afghanistan. “We will disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda, while preventing Af-

ghanistan from again serving as a base for terrorists,” he said. “And because of our drawdown in Iraq, we are now able to apply the resources necessary to go on offense.” This is the approach of endless war.

While Obama was declaring that “our most urgent task is to restore our economy and put the millions of Americans who have lost their jobs back to work,” I went to a National Priorities Project webpage and looked at cost-of-war counters spinning like odometers in manic overdrive. The figures for the “Cost of War in Afghanistan” – already above \$329 billion – are now spinning much faster than the ones for war in Iraq. [www.costofwar.com]

One day in March 1969, a Nobel Prize-winning biologist spoke at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “Our government has become preoccupied with death,” George Wald said, “with the business of killing and being killed.” More than four decades later, how much has really changed?

CT

Norman Solomon is the author of many books including “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.” He is co-chair of the Healthcare Not Warfare campaign, launched by Progressive Democrats of America.

If, nine years after 9/11, we are supposed to believe that U.S forces can now “start” taking the fight to “the terrorists,” this is truly war without end

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Towering lunacy

Green enthusiasm for vertical farms shows that no one is untouched by magical thinking, writes **George Monbiot**

The idea itself might not interest you. But the insight it gives into the filtering techniques human beings use is fascinating

No one is immune to it; in some respects it is the foundation of our lives. Magical thinking is a universal affliction. We see what we want to see, deny what we don't. Confronted by uncomfortable facts, we burrow back into the darkness of our cherished beliefs. We will do almost anything – cheat, lie, stand for high office, go to war – to shut out challenges to the way we see the world.

I spend much of my time confronting one aspect of denial: the virulent repudiation of environmental constraints by those who admit no challenge to their vision of the world. But it pains me to report that denial and wishful thinking are almost as common on the other side of the argument.

I find myself at odds with other greens almost as often as I find myself fighting our common enemies. I've had bruising battles over a long series of miracle solutions supported by my friends: liquid biofuels, hydrogen cars and planes, biochar plantations, solar electricity in the UK, scrappage payments, feed-in tariffs.

But no green delusion is as crazy as the one I am about to explain. The idea itself might not interest you. But the insight it gives into the filtering techniques human beings use is fascinating. So please bear with me while I spell out the latest madness.

That there's a problem is undeniable. As some of the papers published yesterday by

the Royal Society show, farmland is in short supply, water shortages could impose ever tighter constraints on agriculture and there are grave questions about whether or not a growing population can continue to be fed. There are a number of plausible solutions. But none of them appeals to some environmentalists as much as the towering lunacy promoted by a parasitologist at Columbia University called Dickson Despommier.

Despommier points out that while horizontal space for growing crops is limited, vertical space remains abundant. So he proposes that crops should be grown in skyscrapers, which he calls vertical farms. These, he claims, will feed the growing population so efficiently that ordinary farmland will be allowed to revert to forest. Vertical farms will feed the urban populations that surround them, eliminating the need for long-distance transport.

You can, if you shield your eyes very carefully, see the attraction. But even a brief reading of Despommier's essays reveals a few trifling problems. He proposes that 30-storey towers should be built to feed local people in places like Manhattan. You wouldn't see any change from \$100m, possibly \$200m. The only crop which could cover such costs is high-grade cannabis. But a 30-storey hydroponic skunk tower would be quite hard to conceal.

Without offering any explanation for this

amazing claim, Despommier asserts that his system will require “no herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers”. Perhaps he has never seen a fungal infestation in a greenhouse. And what does he expect the plants to grow on: water and air alone? He also insists that there will be “no need for fossil-fueled machinery”, which suggests that he intends to farm a 30-storey building without pumps, heating or cooling systems.

His idea, he says, is an antidote to “intensive industrial farming, carried out by an ever decreasing number of highly mechanized farming consortia” but then he calls on Cargill, Monsanto, Archer Daniels Midland and IBM to fund it(10). He suggests that “locally grown would become the norm”, but fails to explain why such businesses wouldn’t seek the most lucrative markets for their produce, regardless of locality. He expects, in other words, all the usual rules of business, economics, physics, chemistry and biology to be suspended to make way for his idea.

But the real issue is scarcely mentioned in his essays on the subject: light. One of my readers, the film maker John Russell, sent me his calculations for the artificial lighting Despommier’s towers would require. They show that the light required to grow the 500 grammes of wheat that a loaf of bread contains would cost, at current prices, £9.82. (The current farm gate price for half a kilo of wheat is 6p.) That’s just lighting: no inputs, interest, rents, rates, or labour. Somehow this minor consideration - that plants need light to grow and that they aren’t going to get it except on the top storey - has been overlooked by the scheme’s supporters. I won’t bother to explain the environmental impacts.

None of this has dented the popularity of Despommier’s dumb idea. It has featured in the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, *Scientific American*, and on the BBC, CNN, Dis-

covery Channel and NBC. Three weeks ago the Guardian published a supportive piece, whose author appeared to be unaware that nutrients don’t magically regenerate themselves in an agricultural system. Environmentalists love it. Treehugger.com claimed that vertical farming would “help us stop the use of pesticides, herbicides, oil-based fertilizers” and suggested, again unhindered by evidence, that it could produce a net output of energy. The Huffington Post said the idea is “so simple, so elegant that you wonder why you didn’t think of it yourself.”

In my grouchier moments I feel that only those who grow some of their own food should write about food production. Horticulture, with its endlessly varied constraints and disappointments, is an excellent corrective to wishful thinking. But this is about much more than ignorance and inexperience. It’s about seeing something you like - local food for example - and allowing that idea to crowd out everything else. This is how we all live.

In a recent essay in *New Scientist* the psychologist Dorothy Rowe explained that none of us can see reality. We have to construct it from our interpretation of what we perceive, tempered by experience. As a result, each of us exists in our own world of meaning. It is constantly at risk of being shattered by inconvenient facts.

If we acknowledge them, they can destroy our sense of self. So, to ensure that we won’t be “overwhelmed by the uncertainty inherent in living in a world we can never truly know”, we shut them out by lying to ourselves. Though it challenges my sense of self, I am forced to accept that my allies can lie to themselves as fluently as my opponents can.

CT

*George Monbiot’s latest book is **Bring On The Apocalypse***

Somehow this minor consideration - that plants need light to grow and that they aren’t going to get it except on the top storey - has been overlooked by the scheme’s supporters

READ THE BEST OF **FRONTLINE MAGAZINE**
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Flying the flag, faking the news

John Pilger traces the history of propaganda to Edward Bernays, who believed in ‘engineering public consent’ and creating ‘false realities’ as news. Here are examples of how this works today

Bernays was no rabid right-winger. He was an elitist liberal who believed that “engineering public consent” was for the greater good

Edward Bernays, the American nephew of Sigmund Freud, is said to have invented modern propaganda. During the first world war, he was one of a group of influential liberals who mounted a secret government campaign to persuade reluctant Americans to send an army to the blood-bath in Europe. In his book, *Propaganda*, published in 1928, Bernays wrote that the “intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses was an important element in democratic society” and that the manipulators “constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power in our country”. Instead of propaganda, he coined the euphemism “public relations”.

The American tobacco industry hired Bernays to convince women they should smoke in public. By associating smoking with women’s liberation, he made cigarettes “torches of freedom”.

In 1954, he conjured a communist menace in Guatemala as an excuse for overthrowing the democratically-elected government, whose social reforms were threatening the United Fruit company’s monopoly of the banana trade. He called it a “liberation”.

Bernays was no rabid right-winger. He was an elitist liberal who believed that “engineering public consent” was for the greater good. This was achieved by the cre-

ation of “false realities” which then became “news events”. Here are examples of how it is done these days:

False reality – The last US combat troops have left Iraq “as promised, on schedule”, according to President Barack Obama. TV screens have filled with cinematic images of the “last US soldiers” silhouetted against the dawn light, crossing the border into Kuwait.

Fact – They are still there. At least 50,000 troops will continue to operate from 94 bases. American air assaults are unchanged, as are special forces’ assassinations. The number of “military contractors” is currently 100,000 and rising. Most Iraqi oil is now under direct foreign control.

False reality – BBC presenters and reporters have described the departing US troops as a “sort of victorious army” that has achieved “a remarkable change in [Iraq’s] fortunes”. Their commander, General David Petraeus, is a “celebrity”, “charming”, “savvy” and “remarkable”.

Fact – There is no victory of any sort. There is a catastrophic disaster; and attempts to present it as otherwise are a model of Bernays’ campaign to “re-brand” the slaughter of the first world war as “necessary” and “noble”. In 1980, Ronald Reagan, running for president, re-branded the

invasion of Vietnam, in which up to three million people died, as a “noble cause”, a theme taken up enthusiastically by Hollywood. Today’s Iraq war movies have a similar purging theme: the invader as both idealist and victim.

False reality – It is not known how many Iraqis have died. They are “countless” or maybe “in the tens of thousands”.

Fact – As a direct consequence of the Anglo-American led invasion, a million Iraqis have died. This figure from Opinion Research Business is based on peer-reviewed research led by Johns Hopkins University in Washington DC, whose methods were secretly affirmed as “best practice” and “robust” by the Blair government’s chief scientific adviser, as revealed in a Freedom of Information search. This figure is rarely reported or presented to “charming” and “savvy” American generals. Neither is the dispossession of four million Iraqis, the malnourishment of most Iraqi children, the epidemic of mental illness and the poisoning of the environment.

False reality – The British economy has a deficit of billions which must be reduced with cuts in public services and regressive taxation, in a spirit of “we’re all in this together”.

Fact – We are not in this together. What is remarkable about this public relations triumph is that only 18 months ago the diametric opposite filled TV screens and front pages. Then, in a state of shock, truth was unavoidable, if briefly. The Wall Street and City of London financiers’ trough was on full view for the first time, along with the venality of once celebrated snouts. Billions in public money went to inept and crooked organisations known as banks, which were spared debt liability by their Labour government sponsors.

Within a year, record profits and personal bonuses were posted, and state and media propaganda had recovered its equilibrium.

Suddenly, the “black hole” was no longer the responsibility of the banks, whose debt is to be paid by those not in any way responsible: the public. The received media wisdom of this “necessity” is now a chorus, from the BBC to the *Sun*. A masterstroke, Bernays would surely say.

False reality – The former government minister Ed Miliband offers a “genuine alternative” as leader of the British Labour Party.

Fact – Miliband, like his brother David, the former foreign secretary, and almost all those standing for the Labour leadership, is immersed in the effluent of New Labour. As a New Labour MP and minister, he did not refuse to serve under Blair or speak out against Labour’s persistent warmongering. He now calls the invasion of Iraq a “profound mistake”. Calling it a mistake insults the memory and the dead. It was a crime, of which the evidence is voluminous. He has nothing new to say about the other colonial wars, none of them mistakes. Neither has he demanded basic social justice: that those who caused the recession clear up the mess and that Britain’s fabulously rich corporate minority be seriously taxed, starting with Rupert Murdoch.

Of course, the good news is that false realities often fail when the public trusts its own critical intelligence, not the media. Two classified documents recently released by Wikileaks express the CIA’s concern that the populations of European countries, which oppose their governments’ war policies, are not succumbing to the usual propaganda spun through the media. For the rulers of the world, this is a conundrum, because their unaccountable power rests on the false reality that no popular resistance works. And it does. **CT**

John Pilger received the Sydney Peace Prize last November. His latest book, Freedom Next Time, is now available in paperback.

Their unaccountable power rests on the false reality that no popular resistance works. And it does

A perfect storm for propaganda

Jeff Nygaard tells how shrinking budgets and human nature set us up for spin from journalists and politicians

As newsrooms continue to shrink, fewer and fewer newspapers can afford to send reporters out to see things for themselves

“[H]ow we think is not just mildly interesting, not just a subject for intellectual debate, but a matter of life and death. If those in charge of our society – politicians, corporate executives, and owners of press and television – can dominate our ideas, they will be secure in their power. They will not need soldiers patrolling the streets. We will control ourselves.” – From the book “Declarations of Independence” by the late historian and activist Howard Zinn.

There are five factors in the current information environment that together constitute a sort of Perfect Storm for the promotion of certain ideas that serve the interests of powerful people and institutions. That is, they make for a Perfect Storm for the rise of Propaganda. The five factors are:

1. Shrinking Resources for Journalism.
2. Power Shifting to Elite Journalists.
3. Power Shifting to Official Sources.
4. Individualism as a Way of Seeing the World.
5. Individual Identity and Psychology

I'll go over each of them in turn.

1. Shrinking Resources for Journalism

Between 2001 and 2009 it is estimated that approximately 25 percent of newsroom staffs at the nation's newspapers were elimi-

nated. I focus on newspapers because “most of what the public learns is still overwhelmingly driven by traditional media – particularly newspapers.” That's according to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ).

2. Power Shifting to Elite Journalists

As newsrooms continue to shrink, fewer and fewer newspapers can afford to send reporters out to see things for themselves. Former New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reporter Bill Walsh reported last year that “daily papers in every major American city have scaled back their Washington bureaus or closed them altogether.”

Walsh adds that “To save money, newspapers fill their pages with stories from subscription wire services such as The Associated Press and Reuters.” In addition to wire services, many newspapers now save money by subscribing to one of the news syndicates run by the major papers, such as the New York Times Syndicate, Tribune Media Services, the Washington Post Writers Group, and so forth. For example, on the day I am writing these words, every non-local story in my local newspaper the *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis) comes from the Associated Press, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, or simply “news services.” This is a typical day, and it's most likely the same in your town. So national and

international news events are now mostly reported from the point of view of the “big boys” at the big papers. Or, as former *New York Times* columnist Russell Baker calls them, “top-drawer newspeople.” Here’s Baker, writing in the *New York Review of Books* in 2003:

“Today’s top-drawer Washington newpeople are part of a highly educated, upper-middle-class elite; they belong to the culture for which the American political system works exceedingly well. Which is to say, they are, in the pure sense of the word, extremely conservative... This is not a background likely to produce angry reporters and aggressive editors... the capacity for outrage had been bred out of them.”

It’s surprisingly difficult to find out what “top-drawer newspeople” are paid, but the minimum salary for a “top” reporter at the *New York Times* this year is estimated to be about \$93,000.00. That puts them in the top 10 percent of income earners in the United States. In contrast, a top reporter at the *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald-Leader* makes just \$36,000, somewhat below the median income in the United States.

I’m not talking only about income, but more broadly I’m talking about the somewhat-difficult-to-measure issue of social class. Press critic David Zurawik of the *Baltimore Sun* puts it simply, saying that “the upper strata of the Washington press corps has always come from the prep-school-Ivy-league circuit, the sons and daughters of America’s ruling class.”

When these “sons and daughters” receive information from other members of their class, they are naturally inclined to believe it. People tend to more readily believe people who are “just like them.” That’s why we so often see news reports that claim to tell us what “Democrats believe,” or “Republicans believe.” Reporters don’t know what these people “believe,” they only know what they say they believe. But “top-drawer” reporters are not skeptical of their powerful sources, so they report their statements as fact.

3. Power Shifting to Official Sources

Elite journalists may still be on the job, but they, too, are being forced to work with fewer resources. With less and less time available to gather information, reporters increasingly rely on people to feed it to them. The problem is, most of the time it is fed to them by powerful, non-journalistic actors who see and/or portray events from a certain self-interested point of view. PEJ puts it this way: “Shrinking newsrooms are asking their remaining ranks to produce first accounts more quickly and feed multiple platforms [blogs, websites, etc]. This is focusing more time on disseminating information and somewhat less on gathering it, making news people more reactive and less proactive.” This, in turn is “leading to a phenomenon in which the first account from newsmakers – their press conferences and press releases – make their way to the public often in a less vetted form, sometimes close to verbatim. Those first accounts, sculpted by official sources, then can rapidly spread more widely now through the power of the Web to disseminate, gaining a velocity they once lacked. That is followed quickly by commentary. What is squeezed is the supplemental reporting that would unearth more facts and context about events.”

What they mean by “supplemental reporting” is sometimes referred to as “enterprise reporting.” In the journalism world, this is defined as “stories not based on press releases or news conferences.” There is a cost associated with “enterprise reporting” – that is, what we used to call “journalism” – so we have less and less of it, and more and more of the “verbatim” passing along of what is sometimes called “spin,” and which I call Public Relations.

4. Individualism as a Way of Seeing the World.

Individualism is a central part of the US way of seeing the world. In the realm of journalism, this leads to a number of outcomes. For one thing, it justifies and explains why reporters are so dependent on interviews with

With less and less time available to gather information, reporters increasingly rely on people to feed it to them

PROPAGANDA 2

No matter how heinous or criminal someone's behavior may be, if you ask them directly about it, they will almost invariably have some reason why it wasn't so bad

and press conferences by the people “making the news.” The best sources for serious challenges to the groupthink of institutions are the workers, soldiers, and lower-level functionaries that have less at stake in the outcomes (and who more closely see what is really going on). And the best way to understand institutions and the systems of which they are a part is to de-focus on the individuals within them and observe outcomes and patterns over time. US journalists rarely do these things, as they are trained to zero in on whichever individuals happen to be speaking for the institutions the reporters are covering. As a result, what we get are endless debates about who is to blame for something, or which executive can “turn things around,” or who is a “strong leader.” What we almost never get – due in large part to this unconscious bias towards the individual – is a serious discussion of how systems and institutions work, and how they have a life of their own.

When reporters spend most or all of their time listening to and looking at individuals speaking about their personal role in events, or that of their superiors, they come to see things through the eyes of the individuals. What's wrong with that? Well...

5. Individual Identity and Psychology

Every person wants to believe they are a good/worthy/competent person. Thus, when confronted with evidence of “negative” behavior (behavior expected to meet with disapproval), most of us will take a defensive posture in the interest of retaining our idea of ourselves as good people.

Within the individual, this need to be “good” requires that one's mission, agency, administration, or party maintain a positive identity, first of all with oneself. But secondly, one's public identity must be protected. And here we really get into the realm of Public Relations.

No matter how heinous or criminal someone's behavior may be, if you ask them directly about it, they will almost invariably have some reason why it wasn't so

bad. Maybe we tell ourselves that what we did was done in the interests of the greater good (“We had to torture those people in order to keep ourselves safe.”) Or it wasn't our fault (“It was such a huge hurricane we couldn't have known that the levees would break.”) Or it was out of anyone's control (“No one could have seen the housing bubble.”) When reporters spend most of their time speaking with individuals who not only have this universal tendency, but also share many of their ABCs (Attitudes, Beliefs, and Conceptions of how the world works), it becomes more difficult to question the basic rationale of a policy. After all, they are being repeatedly told that the failure is due to a lack of resources, or obstruction by the other party, or the cunning enemy, or bad intelligence, or... whatever the official spokesperson is paid to say. Or actually believes.

The official spokespeople, or their anonymous cronies who are so often quoted in the media, most likely do believe what they are saying. That's partly why they are there instead of someone less invested in the PR. But it doesn't really matter if they believe it, or if it's just a snow job. Either way they will spend as much time as necessary in order to maintain a positive self-identity, and to maintain their good reputation with the public.

In summary, then, here is how the Perfect Storm for Propaganda works:

Everyone needs to see themselves as a good person. When reporters talk to representatives of institutions that sometimes do horrible things, they thus hear these “good people's” rationalizations. Reporters resemble and relate to these people, so they easily accept the rationalizations. Socialized to see things individualistically, they think these individual perspectives are not only valid, but are the best source for “truth” about what is going on. Less well-socialized reporters might challenge these sources, but since they have failed to rise to the top of their profession (in part because they are less well-socialized), they have fallen victim

to budget cuts and are out of the picture.

What remains is a group of elite, well-socialized reporters relying for their (and our) information on other elite, well-socialized spokespeople and leaders whose job, and inclination, is to put their behavior in the best light possible. The predictable result? Propaganda.

Internalized Public Relations

I mentioned that official spokespeople, when confronted with evidence of wrongdoing, will typically engage in Public Relations, attempting to convince journalists (and thus the public) that their failure was caused by some external factor, or bad luck, or acts of God, or something – ANYTHING – that preserves the reputation of the institution under examination. This is typically accomplished by deployment of a number of fairly standard “PR Points,” such as the idea that the problem is due to a lack of resources, or is due to obstruction by another party, or is attributable to an especially cunning enemy, or is due to bad intelligence, or... whatever the official spokesperson is paid to say.

How much easier it would be for the Propagandist if journalists had so thoroughly internalized the desired positive attitude that they would decide on their own to make the excuses – without even being asked to do so! That is, if journalists had internalized the public relations function and carried it in their heads already. That is exactly what we often see, for the reasons outlined in the previous article. I call this syndrome “Internalized Public Relations,” and the recent leak of documents about the US occupation of Afghanistan offers a perfect illustration how it works.

Leaking Documents, Reporting the Spin

On July 26th the whistleblower website WikiLeaks released almost 100,000 secret military documents concerning the US occupation of Afghanistan. The documents contain an unbelievable number of details about various crimes, failures, illegal uses of force, weird deployments of US power, etc.

It’s pretty damning stuff. The thing to note here is that these documents were leaked, and thus were not provided by a Propagandist. Had it been an official release, major efforts would have been made to convince journalists that, as bad as the evidence may be, the military itself is good, so journalists should not take this evidence in the wrong way.

In this case, in an indication of the degree to which elite journalists have internalized the needed Public Relations lessons, they took it upon themselves to make some major PR Points on their own, which can be clearly seen in the coverage during the first few days after the leaks were published. The *New York Times* was the only US news organization offered direct access to the documents before their official release, and the *Times* went out of its way to imply that no one should lose faith in the military and its good intentions. (It’s worth noting here that most of the reporters assigned by the *Times* to analyze the documents had previously been embedded with US troops, either in Iraq or Afghanistan. Embedding is a relatively new PR tactic, aimed at reinforcing the desired attitudes of journalists toward the troops and their mission.)

Here are a few examples of some of the major PR Points voluntarily supplied by the *Times*. First you’ll see the PR Point, immediately followed by an exact quotation from the *Times*’s 13,000-word report on the day of the release, July 26th. Emphasis in each quotation has been added by me.

PR Point #1: A Lack of Resources. “The secret documents, released on the Internet by an organization called WikiLeaks, are a daily diary of an American-led force often starved for resources and attention as it struggled against an insurgency that grew larger, better coordinated and more deadly each year.”

PR Point #2: Our Allies Are No Good. “The reports paint a disheartening picture of the Afghan police and soldiers at the center of the American exit strategy.

The *Times* went out of its way to imply that no one should lose faith in the military and its good intentions

First of all, it appears that the reporter expects readers to accept that “minimizing civilian casualties” is a “war strategy”

PR Point #3: Good Intentions, Bewildering Problems, Not Our Fault. “The documents show how the best intentions of Americans to help rebuild Afghanistan through provincial reconstruction teams ran up against a bewildering array of problems – from corruption to cultural misunderstandings – as they tried to win over the public by helping repair dams and bridges, build schools and train local authorities.”

PR Point #4: They Don’t Understand Us. The *Times* quotes a “civil affairs official” who recommends “a public information program to educate Afghans about democracy.”

PR Point #5: Tragic Accidents in the Fog of War. “The reports reveal several instances of allied forces accidentally firing on one another or on Afghan forces in the fog of war, often with tragic consequences.”

PR Point #6: The Cunning Enemy “Documents in the Afghan archive capture the strange nature of the drone war in Afghanistan: missile-firing robots killing shovel-wielding insurgents, a remote-controlled war against a low-tech but resilient insurgency.”

PR Point #7: Sure, We Make Mistakes, But... “JUNE 17, 2007 PAKTIKA PROVINCE INCIDENT REPORT: Botched Night Raid”

PR Point #8: It’s a Heroic Effort, and It’s Working “Ten members of the Green Berets would receive Silver Stars for their actions during the battle [April 6, 2008 Nuristan Province], the highest number given to Special Forces soldiers for a single battle since the Vietnam War. By Army estimates, 150 to 200 militants were killed in the battle.”

PR Point #9: Whom Do You Trust? “Much of the information ... cannot be verified and likely comes from sources aligned with Afghan intelligence, which considers Pakistan an enemy, and paid informants... But many of the reports rely on sources that the military rated as reliable.” (See above on “Army estimates”)

One other point, about US “war strategy,” deserves special attention, and I will turn to that now.

The Real Afghan War Strategy

One PR Point made in the *New York Times*’s coverage of the WikiLeaks documents story is sufficiently convoluted as to require a little explaining. Here are the words the *Times* wrote: “The shifting tactics of the Americans can be seen as well in the reports, as the war strategy veered from freely using force to trying to minimize civilian casualties. But as the documents make clear, each approach has its frustrations for the American effort.”

This paragraph makes no sense at all as far as I can tell, but let’s take it apart to see if we can at least come up with a good guess as to what encoded message might be deciphered. First of all, it appears that the reporter expects readers to accept that “minimizing civilian casualties” is a “war strategy.” It’s not, for a couple of reasons. First of all, what the US military is doing in Afghanistan is not a “war.” A better word is “occupation,” although it’s a modified, 21st-Century kind of occupation. According to international law (The Hague Convention of 1907, Article 42) “Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army.” Since Afghanistan is not directly under the authority of the US army, it’s not a classic, by-the-book occupation.

So, who is the authority in Afghanistan? In an independent country, the population is under the authority of the police. Yet here’s what the *Times* says that the Wikileaks documents tell us about the Afghan police:

“[T]he police have proved to be an especially risky investment and are often described as distrusted, even loathed, by Afghan civilians. The reports recount episodes of police brutality, corruption petty and large, extortion and kidnapping. Some police officers defect to the Taliban. Others are accused of collaborating with insurgents, arms smugglers and highway bandits. Afghan police officers defect with trucks or weapons, items captured during successful ambushes or raids.”

The first reason, then, that “minimizing

civilian casualties” is not a “war strategy” is that it’s not a war. The second reason is that “minimizing civilian casualties” is not a “strategy.” The famous military theoretician Carl von Clausewitz said that “Tactics is the art of using troops in battle; strategy is the art of using battles to win the war.” So the decision to rein in the troops so they don’t kill so many innocents is a tactic, not a strategy.

What is the strategy, then? What is the victory that the troops are being deployed to “win”? The answer was given by the *Times*, in the quote above about the “risky investment.” The strategy is for the United States to attempt to dominate this strategically-placed country without having to permanently occupy it. US planners apparently think that this can be done by “investing” in local police, military, and intelligence forces with the understanding that they, as key institutions in a strategically important area, will accept US authority while appearing to be accountable to the government of Afghanistan, and not to the Empire. (In an August 25th story, for example, the *Times* reported without comment that “From 2002 until just last year, the C.I.A. paid the entire budget of Afghanistan’s spy service, the National Directorate of Security.”)

What we have in Afghanistan is a hugely corrupt administration, supported by the United States, with laws enforced by a security infrastructure that is “distrusted, even loathed” by the population but is also supported by the United States. So I think we

can see the real “war strategy”: To have a compliant client state in the region that accepts its role as a part of the US world system.

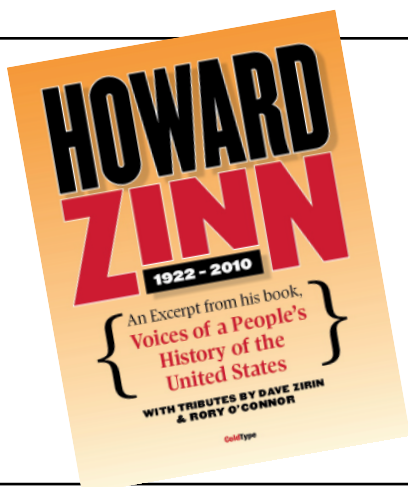
To make the point that “the war strategy” is “to minimize civilian casualties” is so implausible – irrational, really – that it’s hard to believe the reporters came up with it on their own. The most positive interpretation here would be that the attempts to “minimize” the killing of innocents is a tactic in service of something that might really be understood to be a strategy.

That is, military leaders can see that the mission – an ongoing occupation of a nation in the interests of creating a subservient client state in a strategically important part of the world – is hampered when innocent people are slaughtered and their deaths with a cavalier disregard for the victims (whose numbers are not even tallied by the occupying forces).

While tactics in Afghanistan may have to be changed “from freely using force to trying to minimize civilian casualties,” the “war strategy” remains what it has always been: To use the world’s most powerful military to maintain a global Empire. **CT**

Jeff Nygaard is a writer and activist in Minneapolis, Minnesota who publishes a free email newsletter called Nygaard Notes, found at www.nygaardnotes.org A version of this article appeared in Nygaard Notes Number 462, September 2, 2010

What we have in Afghanistan is a hugely corrupt administration, supported by the United States, with laws enforced by a security infrastructure that is “distrusted, even loathed” by the population but is also supported by the United States



PAYING TRIBUTE TO HOWARD ZINN

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Spy vs Spy

We all laughed at the ineptitude of those recently-exposed Russian spies, writes **John Feffer**, but are ours any better?

Didn't anyone tell Boris and Natasha that the Cold War is over and they can get all the intelligence they need from open sources or through the usual crypto-diplomatic channels?

In espionage, as in sports, we generally see the heroism of our side and the perfidy of the opponent. The latest spy scandal involving the Russian “sleepers” is a case in point.

The coverage of the Russian spy ring has been full of intriguing and salacious details: forged passports, fake identities, and secret coded texts posted on the Internet. There was even that indispensable element of the post-007 era: the KGB's comely Anna Chapman and her honey-traps. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to rely on – and celebrate – these “illegals” who burrow into societies under false names and remain planted for years.

Oh, those crazy Russians! Didn't anyone tell Boris and Natasha that the Cold War is over and they can get all the intelligence they need from open sources or through the usual crypto-diplomatic channels?

But in espionage, as in politics, it's all who you know. Human intelligence – or HUMINT – remains a key element of spy-craft. This rule applies as much to the untrustworthy Russkies as it does to the home team. Remember the huge appendix of agents in Philip Agee's pathbreaking *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*? Most of these were the usual chiefs of station, but the list also included people like Lloyd Haskins, an agent who worked as the executive secretary of the International Federation of Petroleum

and Chemical Workers. The CIA did its fair share of infiltration.

But rather than train moles who can masquerade as locals, the CIA has specialized in cultivating “assets,” namely foreigners willing to cough up secrets for cash or a ticket to a safe house in the Midwest. These operations, in turn, have been compromised by double agents in the United States. In the mid-1980s, for instance, Aldrich Ames nearly singlehandedly destroyed US assets inside Russia from his position within the Directorate of Operations, which runs HUMINT.

Those who have directed scorn at the Russians for what seemed to be third-rate spying should remember that the CIA entrusted secrets to a notorious drunk who was lousy at his job as a Soviet analyst. Not surprisingly, the CIA's reputation, post-Ames, fell to the level of a junk bond.

But it gets worse. In his book *The CIA and the Culture of Failure*, John Diamond connects the dots between a succession of US intelligence failures. The intelligence community failed to predict or prevent 9/11, screwed up royally with the intel on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, didn't anticipate the subsequent Iraqi insurgency or the post-2002 revival of the Taliban in Afghanistan, was caught flat-footed by North Korea's nuclear weapons program, and has failed to penetrate al-Qaeda and capture Osama bin

Laden. The Russians look foolish because they seemed to screw up at the penny-ante stuff. The CIA, meanwhile, has blown the high-stakes games. Remember the Jordanian asset who blew up the CIA's Forward Operating Base Chapman in Afghanistan in January? The Russians are no doubt reevaluating Anna Chapman; the United States is still reeling from Base Chapman.

Diamond praises former CIA director George Tenet for rebuilding the agency's HUMINT collection in the wake of the Ames scandal. With such recommendations as depoliticizing intelligence collection, Diamond sensibly urges structural changes within the intelligence community. But he doesn't question the larger mission of the intelligence collection. We read about the Russian spies and we ask: why? But these days, unlike the 1970s and the Church Committee hearings, we rarely ask the same question about our own intelligence activities.

Yes, I'd dearly like to see the end of al-Qaeda, the capture of Osama bin Laden, and no more suicide attacks against US targets. But the question is whether CIA operations can actually help accomplish these goals. Remember: Moscow was running a spy in the very bowels of the CIA's Directorate of Operations. You can't get better intel than that. But even Aldrich Ames did not prevent the Soviet Union from collapse.

Of course the United States should re-

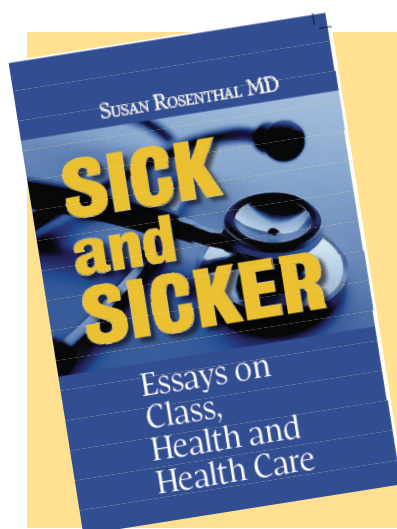
form its intelligence operations. But more importantly, we should take a serious look at why we believe that we need such operations in the first place. Perhaps if we didn't conduct multiple wars around the world, maintain a thousand or so military bases, and attempt to maintain full-spectrum dominance as befits the world's only superpower, we wouldn't need such a vast intelligence community, which now includes a horde of private contractors.

The CIA, through prophylactic information-gathering, can't stop blowback. Only a fundamental change in US foreign and military policy can do that.

We are bemused by the spy operations of a former superpower that no longer has global reach except for an arsenal of largely useless nuclear weapons. "What in the world do they think they were going to get out of this, in this day and age?" former Moscow station chief Richard F. Stolz asked in *The New York Times*. If we ask some hard questions about the means and ends of intelligence-gathering, perhaps we might discover that all this spycraft – with its sad mercantilism, all-too-predictable treacheries, and dubious information – is as overrated on our side as on theirs. **CT**

John Feffer is co-director of Foreign Policy In Focus at the Institute for Policy Studies. This article originally appeared at www.fpij.org

Of course the United States should reform its intelligence operations. But more importantly, we should take a serious look at why we believe that we need such operations in the first place



“Reducing income inequality in the US would save as many lives as would be saved by eradicating heart disease or by preventing all deaths from lung cancer, diabetes, HIV, motor vehicle crashes, homicide and suicide combined”

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Reading Harry Potter at Guantanamo

JK Rowling is the prime reading choice for US detainees!
Andy Worthington tells a different story

It took until 2007 for some uncomfortable truths about the library to emerge, when a letter from a Saudi prisoner, Abdul Aziz al-Oshan (released in September 2007), was unclassified by the Pentagon's censors

Every now and then, when the authorities at Guantánamo want to demonstrate how well catered for the prisoners are, a story emerges that purports to demonstrate how well-stocked the prison library is, and how the prisoners are enjoying a range of titles, including J.K. Rowling's best-selling series of Harry Potter novels.

The first time I recall reading that prisoners in Guantánamo were enjoying reading the Harry Potter books was back in August 2005, when the *Washington Times* – in a story that soon spread around the world – claimed that “Harry Potter's worldwide popularity is so broad-based that it has become favorite reading” for the prisoners at Guantánamo.

That was the opening paragraph of an article entitled, “Detainees under Harry Potter's spell.” However, in the second paragraph, Lori, the civilian contractor who had been overseeing the library for two years, conceded that, although the Harry Potter books were “on top of the request list” for the 520 prisoners held at he time, “followed by Agatha Christie whodunits,” only “a few” were “kind of hooked” on Harry Potter. In a further attempt to make the care of the prisoners appear benevolent, Lori added, “A couple have asked if they can see the movie,” even though, at the time, the only movie-watching privileges granted to

any prisoner were to those who had been extremely cooperative with their interrogators.

When the *Washington Times* published its article, the author also stated that there were “more than 800 books” in the library, in addition to the copies of the Koran made available to most prisoners, although it was also noted that “Detainees may not peruse the bookshelves at Camp Delta ... Instead, a staff of three librarians load up a book cart and go cell to cell.”

In September 2006, just a week after President Bush announced that 14 “high-value detainees” had been moved to Guantánamo from secret CIA prisons whose existence the President had, until that moment, furiously denied, the Pentagon issued “Ten Facts about Guantánamo,” a largely transparent piece of propaganda, which included the risible claim that the “[e]ntertainment” at the prison included “Arabic language TV shows [and] World Cup soccer games.” The press release also claimed that the library – whose most requested book was still Harry Potter – now had “3,500 volumes available in 13 languages.”

It took until 2007 for some uncomfortable truths about the library to emerge, when a letter from a Saudi prisoner, Abdul Aziz al-Oshan (released in September 2007), was unclassified by the Pentagon's censors. In the letter (to his attorneys), al-Oshan, who

had studied at Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud University in Riyadh, explained:

“Some people think that the Gitmo camp library is a big hall with large drawers, well-organized shelves, shiny marble floors, state-of-the-art electronic catalog system for a rich library in which the detainees browse morning and evening, choosing the best of the available books in all fields and sundry sciences, in many different languages – just like that magnificent library I used to walk through five years ago when I was a student at Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud University in Riyadh, conducting my scholastic research work at the time.

“The truth, as all will attest, is that the Gitmo camp library is nothing more than two small gray boxes with which guards walk around in some cell blocks, carrying them above their heads to protect themselves from the burning sun, or, at best, dragging them on a dolly with two little wheels. Inside the two boxes, there are no more than a combination of old, worn-out books, with their covers and some of their leaves torn by rain and other adverse factors that surround these two boxes. Furthermore, they are the same books that have been passed by the detainees for years ... [T]he majority of reading material [is] available in English, which is not spoken or read by the overwhelming majority of inmates. You will surely find books about American history and the founding fathers. The detainees can do no more than turn these books this way and that and enjoy their shiny covers, not knowing what the books are about or gaining any knowledge of their contents.

“In addition, you will find worn-out copies and old issues of *National Geographic*. A few weeks ago, I picked up a copy of that magazine from the ruins of books in that dilapidated box and was astonished that the issue I picked up was dated 1973 – over 30 years ago. I asked the itinerant box carrier (the librarian, as the administration likes to call him) if I could have a more recent issue, dated 2000 or above. Evidently tired of carrying these boxes and walking around

with them, he replied very calmly, ‘You have five more minutes to choose the books you want. This is all we have.’ I thanked him for performing this arduous task and making this strenuous effort, placed that magazine on top of the stack of books in the box, and told him as nicely as I could, ‘Please take my number off the check-out list. As of today, I will have no need for your plentiful library.’”

I have no doubt that the library has improved to some extent since Abdul Aziz al-Oshan wrote his perceptive and slyly humorous letter. Although nine years of imprisonment without charge or trial is, in all ways, worse than six years of imprisonment without charge or trial, it seems clear that President Obama has arranged for more prisoners to be allowed to socialize, to read and to watch films than was imaginable under the Bush administration.

However, in the latest report that once more brought up the popularity of Harry Potter – an article in *Time* on August 20 – it is clear that little has really changed. Although there are now, apparently, “18,000 books, magazines, DVDs and newspapers on offer from the library,” which “span some 18 languages including Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Pashto, Russian, French and English,” the article also stated, in a passage that could have been written in 2005, “Prisoners don’t browse the shelves of this particular library; instead, they wait for a weekly visit by a cart of books prison officers think they might be interested in. There are mysteries and books of poems, copies of *National Geographic* magazine (a favorite), dictionaries and science textbooks. If the prisoners see something they like they are allowed to check it out for 30 days.”

Although the *Time* article also recognized that “There’s not a lot to look forward to if you’re one of the 176 prisoners held in the US detention facility at Guantánamo Bay – no visits from loved ones; no parole or release date; and for many, no prospect even of a day in court to answer charges,” the author, Kayla Webley, couldn’t resist adding, rather

“The truth, as all will attest, is that the Gitmo camp library is nothing more than two small gray boxes with which guards walk around in some cell blocks, carrying them above their heads to protect themselves from the burning sun”

TALL STORY

If these books about a pagan boy-wizard and his companions really are as popular as the authorities are stating, then it serves only to demonstrate that the enduring claims that Guantánamo contains a significant number of al-Qaeda members or sympathizers are wildly mistaken

cheesily, “Still, at least there’s Harry Potter. He may not come riding in on the back of a hippogriff to free his favorite captives from their own version of Azkaban, but he shows up once a week on a cart of books from the prison library, offering an escape of the imagination treasured by many.”

Figures to illustrate exactly how many prisoners were treasuring the “escape of the imagination” offered by J.K. Rowling were not provided by *Time* or by the Pentagon. I was amused by comments made by H. Candace Gorman, the attorney for Abdul Hamid al-Ghizzawi, a Libyan freed in Georgia in March this year, who “likened his own plight to the inmates of Azkaban,” while “President George W. Bush was his own version of Voldemort,” but above all it occurred to me that, if these books about a pagan boy-wizard and his companions really are as popular as the authorities are stating, then it serves only to demonstrate that the enduring claims that Guantánamo contains a significant number of al-Qaeda members or sympathizers are wildly mistaken, as it is unimaginable that, under any circumstances, Osama bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri would take some light relief from their ideology by reading books that are so thoroughly drenched in paganism and sorcery.

Of the 176 prisoners still held, only 35, according to the Obama administration’s own appraisal, have been cleared for release and are not, essentially, regarded as any kind of security threat. Another 35 have been recommended to face trials, 48 are supposed to be detained indefinitely without charge or trial, and 58 others are Yemenis, cleared for release but still held. The ongoing deten-

tion of the Yemenis – for whom only one exception has been made – arose because of hysterical overreaction to reports that the failed Christmas Day plane bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, had been recruited by a Yemeni-based al-Qaeda cell, and fears that any prisoners released will be easy prey for terrorist sympathizers and supporters in their home country of 23 million people (all of whom have, as a result, been tarred as terrorist sympathizers by President Obama’s moratorium on releasing any Yemeni prisoners).

So what does an analysis of these figures mean? Could it be that just 35 non-Yemenis, cleared for release, are the only prisoners avidly devouring the works of J.K. Rowling, or could it be – as seems far more likely – that some of those regarded as a security threat (whether cleared for release or not) are actually the kind of jihadists, terrorists and terrorist sympathizers whose commitment to violent jihad against the United States and other Western targets is so feeble and so overstated that they are actually the kind of men who are trying to while away their seemingly endless confinement with fictional works of pagan escapism?

I think we should be told ...

CT

Andy Worthington is the author of *The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America’s Illegal Prison* (published by Pluto Press, distributed by Macmillan in the US, and available from Amazon – click on the following for the US and the UK) and of two other books: *Stonehenge: Celebration and Subversion* and *The Battle of the Beanfield*. This essay was originally published at www.Cageprisoners.com

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The generals box in Obama on Afghanistan

Recent events leave **Ray McGovern** wondering who's really running the US warfare state, Obama or the Pentagon

Just back from Afghanistan, Marine Commandant, Gen. James Conway held a news conference in August to add his voice to the Pentagon campaign to disparage the July 2011 date President Barack Obama set for US troops to begin leaving Afghanistan.

Conway claimed that intelligence intercepts suggest that this deadline has strengthened the conviction of those resisting the US-led occupation that it is just a matter of time before most foreign forces leave.

Thus, Conway: "In some ways ... it's probably giving our enemy sustenance. ... We think he may be saying to himself ... 'Hey, you know, we only have to hold out for so long.'"

Conway, however, was quick to reassure supporters of the war in Afghanistan that Taliban morale is likely to drop when, "come the fall [of 2011] we're still there hammering them like we have been."

Conway began his press conference by adding a new measure to the refrain led by Gen. David Petraeus, commander of US and allied forces in Afghanistan, that considerable time will be required before Afghan forces can take over from US troops.

The Marine general said, "I honestly think it will be a few years before conditions on the ground are such that turnover will be possible for us," adding, "When some

American unit somewhere in Afghanistan will turn over responsibilities to Afghan forces in 2011, I do not think they will be Marines."

President Obama and his generals have emphasized that any withdrawal will be "conditions based," much as President George W. Bush did regarding Iraq. But setbacks in Afghanistan over the past several months – in particular, the failure of the large Marine campaign to secure Marja, a rural area of Helmand province – have made it abundantly clear that "conditions" are not likely to favor more than a token withdrawal next July.

On a June visit to Afghanistan, Joint Chiefs Chairman, Adm. Mike Mullen discussed the setbacks with *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius. Mullen admitted, "We underestimated some of the challenges" in Marja, which the Marines tried to clear in March, only to have Taliban fighters return.

"They're coming back at night, the intimidation is still there," said Mullen. Marja had been widely advertised by the Pentagon as the warm-up for driving the Taliban out of Kandahar beginning in June 2010.

The US military postponed the campaign against Kandahar in May, and Mullen conceded that, "It's going to take until the end of the year to know where we are" there.

Top Brass vs. President

President Obama and his generals have emphasized that any withdrawal will be "conditions based," much as President George W. Bush did regarding Iraq

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Conway has spoken out before against what he considered – legitimately, in my view – arrogant politicians trying to micromanage Marine offensives in ways that caused needless killing of his Marines

The Obama administration's reluctance to discipline senior generals for comments bordering on insubordination seems to have encouraged the generals to believe they can speak their mind with impunity about President Obama's management of the Afghan conflict.

The exception to this rule was the extraordinary case of Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who was commander of US and allied forces in Afghanistan until he became the subject of a *Rolling Stone* article, "Runaway General," in which McChrystal and his military inner circle were quoted as mocking Obama and the civilian leadership.

The title had an ironic twist since the derogatory comments enabled McChrystal to run away from the consequences of his stumbling war effort, by getting himself fired. After Marja and the abject failure of his campaign to win hearts and minds of most Afghans, McChrystal knew better than anyone that the war was hopeless.

Crusty old Marines like Gen. Conway do not run away – they no longer "fade away," either. Scheduled to retire this fall after 40 years, he isn't angling for some big promotion. Nor is he inclined to sugarcoat military realities in order to calm political nerves in Washington and elsewhere in the country.

Conway has spoken out before against what he considered – legitimately, in my view – arrogant politicians trying to micromanage Marine offensives in ways that caused needless killing of his Marines. For instance, he objected to the Bush administration's cavalier use of Marines to crush resistance in Fallujah, Iraq, in the spring of 2004.

So Gen. Conway let loose at Tuesday's press conference, pointing out "The President was talking to several audiences at the same time when he made his comments regarding July 2011." Implication: The July 2011 date was pure politics; there was no military justification for the deadline then; and there is certainly no military justification for it now.

Conway may be insubordinate, but he is

also correct about that.

Obama tried to have it both ways, giving the hawks in his administration the escalation they wanted while offering the doves in his political base a fixed date for beginning a troop withdrawal. Such cleverness can work sometimes in politics, but it won't work in a difficult war like the one in Afghanistan.

However much Obama may have resented it, by last fall he had to admit to himself that he had been thoroughly outmaneuvered by high-profile generals. Take McChrystal, for example, who was well known to have run special operations assassination squads for five years in Iraq under the aegis of Vice President Dick Cheney. McChrystal also demonstrably lied about who killed football-star-turned-soldier Pat Tillman in Afghanistan.

And yet, Obama couldn't say no, when Defense Secretary Robert Gates and the Pentagon's most famous "water-walker," Gen. Petraeus, told the President to put McChrystal in charge of the war in Afghanistan.

Either from naiveté or hubris or a combination of both, Obama apparently felt he still could maintain some control over the situation through his persuasive skills. Instead, he found himself in a corner.

The Long Reassessment

During last year's long review of US strategy in Afghanistan, McChrystal's recommendations for a major escalation of troops and an open-ended commitment for 10 years or more were leaked to the press. Joint Chiefs Chairman Mullen also made a public case for a long-term commitment, as did Petraeus, who was chief of the Central Command.

Then, during a public presentation in London on Oct. 1, 2009, McChrystal himself said he could not support a presidential decision to fight the war primarily with drone aircraft and Special Forces, the more limited approach advocated by Vice President Joe Biden.

Instead of firing McChrystal then, Obama

on Oct. 2 gave the general a 25-minute counseling session on Air Force One. He then told Pentagon leaders to stop their public advocacy of McChrystal's proposals.

In the book, *The Promise: President Obama, Year One*, author Jonathan Alter said the President was sending the Pentagon "an unmistakable message: Don't toy with me." Obama wasn't going to let himself get backed into a corner, said Alter. Right.

Mullen and Gates were summoned to the White House, but all that emerged was a flaccid statement from Gates saying it was "imperative" that generals provide their advice "candidly but privately." Mullen did tell the generals to knock off the public campaign for a substantial troop buildup in Afghanistan, and the leaks mostly stopped.

However, Obama had been softened up politically. By October 2009, with the reassessment on Afghanistan having dragged on for months, Obama came under attack from former Vice President Dick Cheney and others for supposedly "dithering."

Yet, behind the scenes, other generals – former ones, with less personal stakes in the Afghan War – were resisting the push for major escalation.

James Jones, Obama's national security adviser and a former four-star general, had been pushing back against McChrystal and other hawks. Undercutting the rationale for escalation, Jones told the press on Oct. 4, 2009: "I don't foresee the return of the Taliban. Afghanistan is not in imminent danger of falling. ... The al-Qaeda presence is very diminished. The *maximum estimate is less than 100 operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies.*"

In early November, Obama also received cogent, sober advice from his ambassador in Kabul, Karl Eikenberry, himself a former general who knew twice as much about Afghanistan as McChrystal and Petraeus put together. From 2002 to 2003, Eikenberry was responsible for training Afghan security forces. He then served 18 months (2005-2007) as commander of US forces in

Afghanistan.

In two highly sensitive cables of Nov. 6 and 9, 2009, (the texts of which were almost immediately leaked by an unknown US official to the *New York Times*), Eikenberry declared, "I cannot support [the Defense Department's] recommendation for an immediate Presidential decision to deploy another 40,000 here."

Damning McChrystal's recommendations with faint (and condescending) praise, Eikenberry described them as "logical and compelling within his [McChrystal's] narrow mandate to define the needs for a military counterinsurgency campaign within Afghanistan."

Eikenberry then went on to list a dozen compelling factors that would make adding more troops a fool's errand – among them these three:

- Hamid Karzai was not and never would be "an adequate strategic partner;"
- "More troops won't end the insurgency as long as Pakistan sanctuaries remain ... and Pakistan views its strategic interests as best served by a weak neighbor;"
- "We overestimate the ability of Afghan security forces to take over ... by 2013."

(Who would be better qualified to make the judgment on security forces than the senior officer trying to build and train a fledgling, predominantly illiterate Afghan army from 2002 to 2003?)

Obama Bows to the Four-Stars

But Obama found himself outgunned politically by the pro-escalation crowd. Thanks in large measure to a fawning media, Gen. Petraeus and Gen. McChrystal enjoyed much higher public profiles than James Jones and Ambassador Eikenberry.

And, besides, if the US and NATO failed to prevail in Afghanistan (whatever "prevail" might mean), the overly smart advisers in Obama's White House thought they could blame the generals. After all, the President was giving them what they had demanded.

This kind of reasoning seemed to persuade Obama to dismiss the informed com-

In two highly sensitive cables of Nov. 6 and 9, 2009, Eikenberry declared, "I cannot support [the Defense Department's] recommendation for an immediate Presidential decision to deploy another 40,000 here"

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Obama's dilemma was how to project an image of strength in the fight against the Taliban and still avoid letting Afghanistan become an albatross around his neck in 2011-2012 as the next presidential election drew near

mentary of Ambassador Eikenberry and national security adviser Jones, as well as the views of Vice President Biden. Whether Petraeus and McChrystal had it right or wrong, the politically smart thing to do would be to defer to them.

On Nov. 11, 2009, Veterans Day, Obama called his key advisers and generals together. According to Jonathan Alter, it was then that the President gave preliminary approval for 40,000 more troops to be sent to Afghanistan. But he wanted them in and out quickly. The Pentagon was to prepare a "targeted" plan for protecting population centers, training Afghan security forces, and beginning a real – not a token – withdrawal within 18 months of the escalation.

Too Inexperienced & Too Clever by Half

Obama's dilemma was how to project an image of strength in the fight against the Taliban and still avoid letting Afghanistan become an albatross around his neck in 2011-2012 as the next presidential election drew near.

In Obama's calculation, the image of toughness was to come from giving the generals pretty much what they demanded to carry the fight to the Taliban. The albatross would be avoided, the President thought, by giving the generals a deadline – a date on which US troops would start coming home. Such a deadline would also be helpful in appeasing what used to be called Obama's base – more recently branded "the professional left."

The dual message was crafted presumably with the help of the inept folks who led the long assessment with the wrong conclusions – functionaries like former CIA official Bruce Riedel and Ambassador Richard "we'll-recognize-success-when-we-see-it" Holbrooke. Never ones to pick a fight with beribboned four-stars, they probably repeated their mantra: the military knows best.

Next stop for Obama in deciding how to massage the message was to consult with his own inside group of political wheeler-

dealers – folks with long experience in Congress and in White House positions, such as chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, CIA Director Leon Panetta, former White House chief of staff John Podesta, and Joe Biden.

With the help of this brain trust, Obama settled on what he thought would be a win-win solution – for his administration, if not for US troops.

In the formal meeting on Nov. 29, Obama would get the top brass on record buying into the escalation and timetable. In other words, he would turn the tables on the generals, boxing them in for a change. According to Alter, the dialogue went like this:

Obama: "David [Petraeus], tell me now. I want you to be honest with me. You can do this in 18 months?"

Petraeus: "Sir, I am confident we can train and hand over to the ANA (Afghan National Army) in that time frame."

Obama: "If you can't do the things you say you can in 18 months, then no one is going to suggest we stay, right?"

Petraeus: "Yes, sir, in agreement."

Mullen: "Yes, sir."

Obama then asked Defense Secretary Gates if he had any problems with the scenario, eliciting a response from Gates saying he was fine with the decision.

Obama: "I'm not asking you to change what you believe, but if you don't agree with me that we can execute this, say so now. Tell me now."

Mullen: "Fully support, sir."

Petraeus: "Ditto."

Am I the only one who finds that scene extraordinary?

Alter adds that as Biden walked with the President to the meeting, the Vice President asked if the new policy of beginning a significant withdrawal in 2011 was a direct Presidential order that could not be countermanded by the military. Obama said yes.

That response no doubt accounts for the assurance that Biden later gave at the end of an interview in his West Wing office: "In July 2011 you're going to see a whole lot of people moving out [of Afghanistan]. Bet on

it. Bet on it.”

I imagine that this is not the first foolish bet Joe Biden has made. How naïve for him and Obama to think that they had the generals boxed in and that the generals – along with their powerful allies – could not figure out some way to insist that a change in circumstance necessitated a longer time frame or additional resources.

The next two years are far more likely to witness a Donnybrook between the Pentagon and White House, as the security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate and Petraeus – now commander of US and allied forces in Afghanistan, with his vaunted reputation riding on success – inevitably demands more troops.

Can Obama really believe that Petraeus will honor his Nov. 29 pledge; that when things go really bad in Afghanistan the beribboned general will say, “Shucks, I was wrong”; and then tuck tail, forfeiting any ambition he may harbor eventually to run for President?

With all due respect, President Obama and Vice President Biden, I wouldn't bet on it.

Gen. Conway and Fallujah

We are likely to hear more from Gen. James Conway before he retires this fall. The Marine Commandant has been outspoken for over five years – and with very good reason since his Marines were often the ones bearing the brunt of the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, at times taking casualties because of politically inspired orders that made no military sense.

After turning over command of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq in early September 2004, Conway let not a day pass before excoriating higher officials for misguided, counterproductive orders to attack the Iraqi Sunni stronghold of Fallujah in retaliation for the brutal killing of four US Blackwater contractors on March 31, 2004.

Conway did not repeat the criticism of UN envoy in Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, and many others who denounced the Fallujah

offensive as “collective punishment,” a war crime under international law. But the Marine general did observe that the attack “certainly increased the level of animosity that existed.”

Conway stressed the stupidity of ordering the attack, in which six Marines were killed and six more wounded, and then halting it just three days later.

The reason for the rash order to attack and the sudden reversal related to concerns within George W. Bush's White House, first, that the killings of the contractors could not go unpunished, followed by the realization that the worsening war in Iraq could affect Bush's chances in the 2004 election.

Conway found particularly galling what happened after he was ordered to break off the attack. A handful of former Iraqi generals were allowed to form the “Fallujah Brigade” and were put in charge of the city.

The 800 AK-47 assault weapons, 27 pickup trucks and 50 radios that the Marines gave this “Brigade” wound up in the hands of the resistance, which remained in control of Fallujah. The equipment also was used against Marines positioned near the city.

Asked who issued the order to attack and then halt, Conway would only say that he had advised against the attack in the first place but that “we follow our orders.” According to *The Washington Post*, senior US officials in Iraq said the command to attack and then desist originated in the White House.

Just days after Bush won a second term in November 2004, the assault on Fallujah resumed with US forces virtually leveling the city, partly in retribution for the dead Blackwater contractors and the humiliation that had been dealt the Bush administration.

Most Americans are unaware of this sequence of events in Fallujah in 2004, but should know and ponder what actually happened. First, the Blackwater contractors had taken a wrong turn on March 29 and ended up in the wrong neighborhood in Fallujah.

Western press accounts left the impres-

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WHO'S IN CHARGE?

One of the trucks that dragged the bodies of the mercenaries had a large poster of Yassin in its window, as did many Fallujah storefronts

sion that the murder of the four Blackwater operatives was the work of fanatics who acted without provocation and eventually got – along with thousands of their neighbors – the punishment they deserved. Few are aware that the killings of the contractors represented the second turn in that particular cycle of violence.

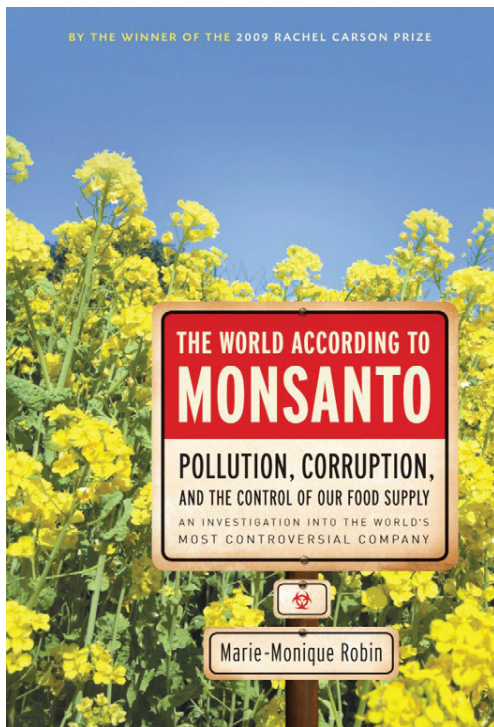
On March 22, 2004, Israeli forces assassinated in Gaza the spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheikh Yassin – a withering old man, blind and confined to a wheel chair. The Blackwater operatives in Fallujah were killed by a group that described itself as the “Sheikh Yassin Revenge Brigade.” One of the trucks that dragged the bodies of the mercenaries had a large poster of Yassin in its window, as did many Fallujah storefronts.

Gen. Conway may already know the full

story. As his retirement nears, he may feel free to point out the actual sequence of events stretching from Gaza to Fallujah and join other realists who have served in the US military and noted the increased dangers to US troops that flow from the widespread perception that US policy is identical to that of Israel.

CT

Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an Army Infantry/Intelligence officer, and then as a CIA analyst for a total of almost 30 years. He now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).



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The secrets in Israel's archives

Evidence of ethnic cleansing was kept under lock and key, writes **Jonathan Cook**

History may be written by the victors, as Winston Churchill is said to have observed, but the opening up of archives can threaten a nation every bit as much as the unearthing of mass graves.

That danger explains a decision quietly taken in July by Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, to extend by an additional 20 years the country's 50-year rule for the release of sensitive documents.

The new 70-year disclosure rule is the government's response to Israeli journalists who have been seeking through Israel's courts to gain access to documents that should already be declassified, especially those concerning the 1948 war, which established Israel, and the 1956 Suez crisis.

The state's chief archivist says many of the documents "are not fit for public viewing" and raise doubts about Israel's "adherence to international law", while the government warns that greater transparency will "damage foreign relations".

Quite what such phrases mean was illustrated by the findings of a recent investigation by an Israeli newspaper. *Haaretz* revisited the Six Day War of 1967, in which Israel seized not only the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza, but also a significant corner of Syria known as the Golan Heights, which Israel still refuses to relinquish.

The consensus in Israel is that the country's right to hold on to the Golan is even stronger than its right to the West Bank. According to polls, an overwhelming majority of Israelis refuse to concede their little bit of annexed Syria, even if doing so would secure peace with Damascus.

This intransigence is not surprising. For decades, Israelis have been taught a grand narrative in which, having repelled an attack by Syrian forces, Israel then magnanimously allowed the civilian population of the Golan to live under its rule. That, say Israelis, is why the inhabitants of four Druze villages are still present there. The rest chose to leave on the instructions of Damascus.

One influential journalist writing at the time even insinuated anti-Semitism on the part of the civilians who departed: "Everyone fled, to the last man, before the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] arrived, out of fear of the 'savage conqueror' ... Fools, why did they have to flee?"

However, a very different picture emerges from *Haaretz's* interviews with the participants. These insiders say that all but 6,000 of the Golan's 130,000 civilians were either terrorised or physically forced out, some of them long after the fighting finished. An army document reveals a plan to clear the area of the Syrian population, with only the exception of the Golan Druze, so as not to upset relations with the loyal Druze com-

For decades, Israelis have been taught a grand narrative in which, having repelled an attack by Syrian forces, Israel then magnanimously allowed the civilian population of the Golan to live under its rule

OPENING THE BOX

What is so intriguing about the newspaper's version of the Golan's capture is the degree to which it echoes the revised accounts of the 1948 war that have been written by later generations of Israeli historians

munity inside Israel.

The army's post-war tasks included flushing out thousands of farmers hiding in caves and woods to send them over the new border. Homes were looted before the army set about destroying all traces of 200 villages so that there would be nowhere left for the former inhabitants to return to. The first Jewish settlers sent to till the fields recalled seeing the dispossessed owners watching from afar.

The *Haaretz* investigation offers an account of methodical and wholesale ethnic cleansing that sits uncomfortably not only with the traditional Israeli story of 1967 but with the Israeli public's idea that their army is the "most moral in the world". That may explain why several prominent, though unnamed, Israeli historians admitted to *Haaretz* that they had learnt of this "alternative narrative" but did nothing to investigate or publicise it.

What is so intriguing about the newspaper's version of the Golan's capture is the degree to which it echoes the revised accounts of the 1948 war that have been written by later generations of Israeli historians. Three decades ago – in a more complacent era – Israel made available less sensitive documents from that period.

The new material was explosive enough. It undermined Israel's traditional narrative of 1948, in which the Palestinians were said to have left voluntarily on the orders of the Arab leaders and in the expectation that the combined Arab armies would snuff out the fledgling Jewish state in a bloodbath.

Instead, the documents suggested that heavily armed Jewish forces had expelled and dispossessed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians before the Jewish state had even been declared and a single Arab soldier had entered Palestine.

One document in particular, *Plan Dalet*, demonstrated the army's intention to expel the Palestinians from their homeland. Its existence explains the ethnic cleansing of more than 80 per cent of Palestinians in the war, followed by a military campaign to destroy hundreds of villages to ensure the refugees never returned.

Ethnic cleansing is the common theme of both these Israeli conquests. A deeper probe of the archives will almost certainly reveal in greater detail how and why these "cleansing" campaigns were carried out – which is precisely why Mr Netanyahu and others want the archives to remain locked.

But full disclosure of these myth-shattering documents may be the precondition for peace. Certainly, more of these revelations offer the best hope of shocking Israeli public opinion out of its self-righteous opposition to meaningful concessions, either to Syria or the Palestinians.

It is also a necessary first step in challenging Israel's continuing attempts to ethnically cleanse Palestinians, as has occurred in the last few weeks against the Bedouin in both the Jordan Valley and the Negev, where villages are being razed and families forced to leave again.

Genuine peacemakers should be demanding that the doors to the archives be thrown open immediately. The motives of those who wish to keep them locked should be clear to all. **CT**

Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jkcook.net

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Ground Zero: Ours and theirs

Kathy Kelly reflects on her forthcoming trial for criminal trespass on a US military base in Nevada

Libby and Jerica are in the front seat of the Prius, and Mary and I are in back. We just left Oklahoma, we're heading into Shamrock, Texas, and tomorrow we'll be Indian Springs, Nevada, home of Creech Air Force Base. We've been discussing our legal defense.

The state of Nevada has charged Libby and me, along with twelve others, with criminal trespass onto the base. On April 9, 2009, after a ten-day vigil outside the air force base, we entered it with a letter we wanted to circulate among the base personnel, describing our opposition to a massive targeted assassination program. Our trial date is set for September 14.

Creech is one of several homes of the US military's aerial drone program. US Air Force personnel there pilot surveillance and combat drones, unmanned aerial vehicles with which they are instructed to carry out extrajudicial killings in Afghanistan and Iraq. The different kinds of drone include the "Predator" and the "Reaper." The Obama administration favors a combination of drone attacks and Joint Special Operations raids to pursue its stated goal of eliminating whatever Al Qaeda presence exists in these countries.

As the US accelerates this campaign, we hear from UN special rapporteur for extrajudicial executions, Philip Alston, who sug-

gests that US citizens may be asleep at the wheel, oblivious to clear violations of international law which we have real obligations to prevent (or at the very least discuss).

Many citizens are now focused on the anniversary of September 11th and the controversy over whether an Islamic Center should be built near Ground Zero. Corporate media does little to help ordinary US people understand that the drones which hover over potential targets in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen create small "ground zeroes" in multiple locales on an everyday basis.

Libby, at the wheel, is telling Jerica about her visit to Kabul, in 1970. "I worked for Pan Am," said Libby, "and that meant being able to stay for free at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. After landing in Pakistan, we hired a driver to take us across the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan. All along the highway we saw herds of camel traveling along a parallel old road. I wonder if the camel market in Kabul is still there?"

Jerica says she'll look for it. She and I have been hard at work to obtain visas and arrange flights for an October trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan. [Libby is exceptional in that she hasn't tried to talk Jerica out of the dangerous travel.]

Conversation switches to whatever CD has just come on, and I tune out, wondering if I've done my share of issuing warnings to Jerica about traveling in a war zone.

Corporate media does little to help ordinary US people understand that the drones which hover over potential targets in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen create small "ground zeroes" in multiple locales on an everyday basis

AWAITING TRIAL

If the engagement includes bombing the area under scrutiny, it would be more apt to say that NATO aimed to puree the militants

Tinny music and rural Texan countryside blend together.

My thoughts drift to the Emergency Surgical Center for Victims of War, in Kabul. A little over two months ago, Josh and I met Nur Said, age 11, in the hospital's ward for young boys injured by various explosions. Most of the boys welcomed a diversion from the ward's tedium, and they were especially eager to sit outside, in the hospital garden, where they'd form a circle and talk together for hours.

Nur Said stayed indoors. Too miserable to talk, he'd merely nod at us, his hazel eyes welling up with tears. Weeks earlier, he had been part of a hardy band of youngsters that helped bolster their family incomes by searching for scrap metal and unearthing land mines on a mountainside in Afghanistan. Finding an unexploded land mine was a eureka for the children because, once opened, the valuable brass parts could be extracted and sold. Nur had a land mine in hand when it suddenly exploded, ripping four fingers off his right hand and blinding him in his left eye.

On a sad continuum of misfortune, Nur and his companions fared better than another group of youngsters scavenging for scrap metal in the Kunar Province on August 26th.

Following an alleged Taliban attack on a nearby police station, NATO forces flew overhead to "engage" the militants. If the engagement includes bombing the area under scrutiny, it would be more apt to say that NATO aimed to puree the militants. But in this case, the bombers mistook the children for militants and killed six of them, aged 6 to 12. Local police said there were no Taliban at the site during the attack, only children.

General Petraeus assures his superiors that the US is effectively using drone surveillance, sensors and other robotic means of gaining intelligence to assure that they are hunting down the right targets for assassination. But survivors of these attacks insist that civilians are at risk. In Afghani-

stan, thirty high schools have shut down because the parents say that their children are distracted by the drones flying overhead and that it's unsafe for them to gather in the schools.

I think of Nur, trapped in his misery, at the Emergency surgical center. He'll be one among many thousands of amputees whose lives are forever altered by the war and poverty that afflict his country. Many of these survivors are likely to feel intense hatred toward their persecutors. 300 villagers in the Sayed Abad district of Wardak province took to the streets in protest on August 12, following an alleged US night raid. "They murdered three students and detained five others," one of the protesters said. "All of them were civilians." Villagers, shocked by the killing, shouted that they didn't want Americans in Afghanistan. According to village eyewitnesses, American troops stormed into a family home and shot three brothers, all young men, and then took their father into custody. One of the young men was a student who had returned to the family home to celebrate the traditional "iftar" fast at the beginning of Ramadan. Local policemen are investigating the allegations, and NATO recently conceded that they may have killed some civilians. (see www.vcnv.org <<http://www.vcnv.org>> Afghanistan Atrocities update).

The drones feed hourly intelligence information to US war commanders, but the machinery can't inform people about the spiraling anger as the US conducts assassination operations in countries throughout the 1.3 billion-strong Muslim world. "Sold as defending Americans," writes Fred Branfman, "(it) is actually endangering us all. Those responsible for it, primarily General Petraeus, are recklessly seeking short-term tactical advantage while making an enormous long-term strategic error that could lead to countless American deaths in the years and decades to come."

The Prius is comfortable, but my side of the backseat has become a makeshift office. The most important file contains Bill

Quigley's comprehensive argumentation as to why the court should allow us to present a necessity defense based on international law. Bill is the Legal Director for the Center for Constitutional Rights. On September 14, we want to call on him as an expert witness. We and our codefendants have chosen to mount a pro se defense to try to persuade our judge that far from committing a crime we have exercised our rights and our duties, under international and US law, to try to prevent one and to raise public opposition to usage of drones in "targeted" assassinations.

Jerica hands me the questions we can use to elicit Bill's testimony. We try to word our questions so that the evidence will be admissible in court. "Could Bill please inform the court about citizen's responsibilities under international law, could he explain to the court what articles and statutes we will be invoking?" To a layperson, it seems like an elaborate game of "Mother May-I," and we haven't even started developing questions to ask Col. Ann Wright, the former US diplomat, who had helped re-open the US Embassy in Kabul shortly before resigning her job in a refusal to cooperate with build-up toward the May 2003 US Shock and Awe invasion of Iraq.

Rounding out our trio of expert witnesses is former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark. We hope his personal experience within the US government might arouse

the court's more careful attention to the seldom-discussed legal issues that are fundamentally at stake here. However, the judge has already indicated that his calendar only allots one day for our trial.

Libby, Jerica, Mary and I have blocked out at least ten days, inclusive of travel, for our small contribution to an ongoing effort of people around the world working to put drones on trial. We're in New Mexico now. I feel cramped and restless, and I wonder if Tucumcari, where we plan to stop for lunch, has internet. We can't possibly bring the testimony of Afghans and Pakistanis to court this Tuesday. Their testimony, borne on bodies scarred and mutilated and harbored in memories of nightmare, will never be given away and cannot be given in court. Extra-judicial killings are killings without rule of law, without trial. Few if any Afghan or Pakistani civilian survivors of US wars will ever travel to a US court of law for consideration of their grievances.

And at this moment I realize that if we were four Afghans or Pakistanis or Iraqis traveling in a war zone, we'd have spent this entire trip watching not the Southwestern landscape, but the skies. **CT**

Kathy Kelly (kathy@vcnv.org)
co-coordinates *Voices for Creative Nonviolence* (www.vcnv.org) Her book, *Other Lands Have Dreams*, is available through Counterpunch.org

We and our codefendants have chosen to mount a pro se defense to try to persuade our judge that far from committing a crime we have exercised our rights and our duties, under international and US law, to try to prevent one and to raise public opposition to usage of drones in "targeted" assassinations

READ THE BEST OF JOHN PILGER
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Red and green

Uri Avnery examines the impact of a new report on international hatred of Israel and asks if it will bring any meaningful change

The first question that arose in my mind was: what impact is this report going to have on the average Israeli?

Channel 10, one of Israel's three TV channels, aired a report last month that surely frightened a lot of viewers. Its title was "Who is Organizing the World-wide Hatred of Israel Movement?", and its subject: the dozens of groups in various countries which are conducting a vigorous propaganda campaign for the Palestinians and against Israel.

The activists interviewed, both male and female, young and old – quite a number of them Jews – demonstrate at supermarkets against the products of the settlements and/or of Israel in general, organize mass meetings, make speeches, mobilize trade unions, file lawsuits against Israeli politicians and generals.

According to the report, the various groups use similar methods, but there is no central leadership. It even quotes (without attribution, of course) the title of one of my recent articles, "The Protocols of the Elders of Anti-Zion" and it, too, asserts that there is no such thing. Indeed, there is no need for a world-wide organization, it says, because all over the place there is a spontaneous surge of pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli feeling. Recently, following the "Cast Lead" operation and the flotilla affair, this process has gathered momentum.

In many places, the report discloses, there are now red-green coalitions: cooperation between leftist human-rights bodies

and local groups of Muslim immigrants.

The conclusion of the story: this is a great danger to Israel and we must mobilize against it before it is too late.

The first question that arose in my mind was: what impact is this report going to have on the average Israeli?

I wish I could be sure that it will cause him or her to think again about the viability of the occupation. As one of the activists interviewed said: the Israelis must be brought to understand that the occupation has a price tag.

I wish I believed that this would be the reaction of most Israelis. However, I am afraid that the effect could be very different.

As the jolly song of the 70s goes: "*The whole world is against us / That's not so terrible, we shall overcome. / For we, too, don't give a damn / For them. // ... We have learned this song / From our forefathers / And we shall also sing it / To our sons. / And the grandchildren of our grandchildren will sing it / Here, in the Land of Israel, / And everybody who is against us / Can go to hell.*"

The writer of this song, Yoram Taharlev ("pure of heart") has succeeded in expressing a basic Jewish belief, crystallized during the centuries of persecution in Christian Europe which reached its climax in the Holocaust. Every Jewish child learns in school that when six million Jews were murdered, the entire world looked on and didn't lift a

finger to save them.

This is not quite true. Many tens of thousands of non-Jews risked their lives and the lives of their families in order to save Jews – in Poland, Denmark, France, Holland and other countries, even in Germany itself. We all know about people who were saved this way – like former Supreme Court President Aharon Barak, who as a child was smuggled out of the ghetto by a Polish farmer, and Minister Yossi Peled, who was hidden for years by a Catholic Belgian family. Only a few of these largely unsung heroes were cited as “Righteous among the Nations” by Yad Vashem. (Between us, how many Israelis in a similar situation would risk their lives and the lives of their children in order to save a foreigner?)

But the belief that “the whole world is against us” is rooted deep in our national psyche. It enables us to ignore the world reaction to our behavior. It is very convenient. If the entire world hates us anyhow, the nature of our deeds, good or bad, doesn’t really matter. They would hate Israel even if we were angels. The Goyim are just anti-Semitic. It is easy to show that this is also untrue. The world loved us when we founded the State of Israel and defended it with our blood. A day after the Six-day War, the whole world applauded us. They loved us when we were David, they hate us when we are Goliath.

This does not convince the world-against-us people. Why is there no worldwide movement against the atrocities of the Russians in Chechnya or the Chinese in Tibet? Why only against us? Why do the Palestinians deserve more sympathy than the Kurds in Turkey?

One could answer that since Israel demands special treatment in all other matters, we are measured by special standards when it comes to the occupation and the settlements. But logic doesn’t matter. It’s the national myths that count.

Israel’s third largest newspaper, *Ma’ariv*, published a story about our ambassador to the United Nations under the revealing headline: “Behind enemy lines”.

I remember one of the clashes I had with Golda Meir in the Knesset, after the beginning of the settlement enterprise and the angry reactions throughout the world. As now, people put all the blame on our faulty “explaining”. The Knesset held a general debate.

Speaker after speaker declaimed the usual clichés: the Arab propaganda is brilliant, our “explaining” is beneath contempt. When my turn came, I said: It’s not the fault of the “explaining”. The best “explaining” in the world cannot “explain” the occupation and the settlements. If we want to gain the sympathy of the world, it’s not our words that must change, but our actions.

Throughout the debate, Golda Meir – as was her wont – stood at the door of the plenum hall, chain-smoking. Summing up, she answered every speaker in turn, ignoring my speech. I thought that she had decided to boycott me, when – after a dramatic pause – she turned in my direction. “Deputy Avnery thinks that they hate us because of what we do. He does not know the Goyim. The Goyim love the Jews when they are beaten and miserable. They hate the Jews when they are victorious and successful.” If clapping were allowed in the Knesset, the whole House would have burst into thunderous applause.

There is a danger that the current worldwide protest will meet the same reaction: that the Israeli public will unite against the evil Goyim, instead of uniting against the settlers.

Some of the protest groups could not care less. Their actions are not addressed to the Israeli public, but to international opinion.

I don’t mean the anti-Semites, who are trying to hitch a ride on this movement. They are a negligible force. Neither do I mean those who believe that the creation of the State of Israel was a historical mistake to start with, and that it should be dismantled.

I mean all the idealists who wish to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and the stealing of their land by the settlers, and to help them to found the free

Many tens of thousands of non-Jews risked their lives and the lives of their families in order to save Jews – in Poland, Denmark, France, Holland and other countries, even in Germany itself

COST OF OCCUPATION

Today a large majority of Israelis say that they want peace and are ready to pay the price, but that, unfortunately, the Arabs don't want peace

State of Palestine.

These aims can be achieved only through peace between Palestine and Israel. And such a peace can come about only if the majority of Palestinians and the majority of Israelis support it. Outside pressure will not suffice.

Anyone who understands this must be interested in a world-wide protest that does not push the Israeli population into the arms of the settlers, but, on the contrary, isolates the settlers and turns the general public against them.

How can this be achieved?

The first thing is to clearly differentiate between the boycott of the settlements and a general boycott of Israel. The TV report suggested that many of the protesters do not see the border between the two. It showed a middle-aged British woman in a supermarket, waving some fruit over her head and shouting: "these come from a settlement!" Then it showed a demonstration against the Ahava cosmetic products that are extracted from the Palestinian part of the Dead Sea. But immediately after, there came a call for a boycott of all Israeli products. Perhaps many of the protesters – or the editors of the film – are not clear about the difference.

The Israeli right also blurs this distinction. For example: a recent bill in the Knesset wants to punish those who support a boycott on the products of Israel, including – as it states explicitly – the products of the settlements.

If the world protest is clearly focused on the settlements, it will indeed cause many Israelis to realize that there is a clear line between the legitimate State of Israel and the illegitimate occupation.

That is also true for other parts of the story. For example: the initiative to boycott the Caterpillar company, whose monstrous bulldozers are a major weapon of the occupation. When the heroic peace activist Rachel Corrie was crushed to death under one of them, the company should have stopped all further supplies unless assured that they

would not be used for repression.

As long as suspected war criminals are not brought to justice in Israel itself, one cannot object to the initiatives to prosecute them abroad.

After the decision by the main Israeli theaters to perform in the settlements, it will be logical to boycott them abroad. If they are so keen to make money in Ariel, they can't complain about losing money in Paris and London.

The second thing is the connection between these groups and the Israeli public.

Today a large majority of Israelis say that they want peace and are ready to pay the price, but that, unfortunately, the Arabs don't want peace. The mainstream peace camp, which could once bring hundreds of thousands onto the street, is in a state of depression. It feels isolated. Among other things, its once close connection with the Palestinians, which was established at the time of Yasser Arafat after Oslo, has become very loose. So have relations with the protest forces abroad.

If people of goodwill want to speed up the end of the occupation, they must support the peace activists in Israel. They should build a close connection with them, break the conspiracy of silence against them in the world media and publicize their courageous actions, organize more and more international events in which Palestinian and Israeli peace activists will be present side by side. It would also be nice if for every ten billionaires who finance the extreme Right in Israel, there were at least one millionaire supporting action in pursuit of peace.

All this becomes impossible if there is a call for a boycott on all Israelis, irrespective of their views and actions, and Israel is presented as a monolithic monster. This picture is not only false, it is extremely harmful.

Many of the activists who appear in this report arouse respect and admiration. So much good will! So much courage! If they point their activities in the right direction, they can do a lot of good – good for the Palestinians, and good for us Israelis, too. **CT**

Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery recently celebrated his 89th birthday

Why the wars can't be won

War is a fool's errand in pursuit of ephemera, writes **John Kozy**

Edmund Burke's statement, "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it" is frequently cited, but in truth, even history's obvious lessons are unrecognized by many who know history very well.

There was a time when every school child could recite the Gettysburg Address from memory, especially its famous peroration: "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." But that resolution has largely gone unfulfilled. So exactly what did the Civil War accomplish?

Most certainly, it preserved the union territorially and abolished slavery – two noteworthy things. But the slaves who were freed, rather than being benefited by their freedom, were left in the lurch, and the prejudicial attitudes of Confederate whites were most likely hardened; they certainly were not softened. So although the war united the nation territorially, it failed to unite its peoples, and that division is still evident today.

After the 2004 Presidential election, The *Dallas Morning News* ran a feature about this division titled Beyond the Red and Blue. Using the red states that went to President Bush and the blue states that went to Sena-

tor Kerry, it pointed out how red and blue states ranked in various categories.

- People in red states are less healthy than those in blue states.
- People in red states earn less than those in blue states.
- People in red states are less educated than those in blue states.
- More people in red states live in mobile homes than those in blue states.
- The red states have higher birth rates among teens than the blue states.
- More people are killed by guns in the red states than in the blue states.

And the *Dallas Morning News* missed a number of other inferior attributes of the red states.

- The red states have higher rates of poverty, both generally and among the elderly, higher rates of crime, both general and violent, have higher rates of infant mortality and divorce, and have fewer physicians per unit of population than do the blue states.

These statistics do not paint a pretty picture. And since the red states are commonly referred to as the conservative heartland, one would think that the people who live in these states would vote against conservative candidates merely on the basis of their own rational, self interests. But they don't.

There's an obvious clash here, for the red states are the home of that group that calls itself "moral America." But how can a moral

Since the red states are commonly referred to as the conservative heartland, one would think that the people who live in these states would vote against conservative candidates merely on the basis of their own rational, self interests

DYING IN VAIN

Neither force nor promises of a future better than the past can win the hearts and minds of people. And soldiers who die in an attempt to change another people's values always die in vain

viewpoint countenance poverty, crime, and infant mortality?

What kind of morality is it that doesn't care for the welfare of people? Just what moral maxim guides the lives of these people? Certainly not the Golden Rule, the Decalogue, or the Second Commandment of Christ. From what I have been able to gather, moral America needs a new moral code. The one it has is, to use a word the members of this group dislike, relative.

So what motivates the conservative nature of the people in the red states? Let's look at some history.

For a century after the Civil War, the south voted Democratic, but not because the people shared any values in common with the rest of the nation's Democrats. (Southerners even distinguished themselves from other Democrats by calling themselves "Dixiecrats.")

These people were Democrats merely because the political party of the war and reconstruction was Republican. And when, in the mid-twentieth century, the Democratic Party championed an end to racial discrimination, these life-long Democrats quickly became Republicans, because the Republican party had in the intervening years become reactionary.

What motivates these people even today, though most likely they don't recognize it, is an unwillingness to accept the results of the Civil War and change the attitudes held before it.

When a society inculcates beliefs over a long period of time, those beliefs cannot be changed by a forceful imposition of others. The beliefs once practiced overtly continue to be held covertly. Force is never an effective instrument of conversion. Martyrdom is preferable to surrender, and even promises of a better future are ineffective.

So what did the Civil War really accomplish? It united a nation without uniting its people. The United States of America became one nation indivisible made up of two disunited peoples; it became a nation divided, and the division has spread.

Therein lies a lesson all nations should have learned. By the force of arms, you can compel outward conformity to political institutions and their laws, but you cannot change the antagonistic attitudes of people, that can remain unchanged for decades and longer waiting for opportunities to reassert themselves.

Any astute reader can apply this lesson to the present day's activities in the Middle East. Neither force nor promises of a future better than the past can win the hearts and minds of people. And soldiers who die in an attempt to change another people's values always die in vain.

All wars, even when carried on by the strongest of nations against weak opponents, are chancy, and their costs, in every respect, are always much more than anticipated, even putting aside the physical destruction and the lives lost.

Nations that have started wars with the psychological certainty of winning rarely have, and when they have, the results were rarely lasting or those sought. As Gandhi once observed, "Victory attained by violence is tantamount to a defeat, for it is momentary."

The Crusaders, fighting under the banner of Christ, could not make Palestine a part of Christendom. France, under Napoleon, conquered most of Europe but lost it all and Napoleon ended up a broken man. Prussian militarism prevailed in the Franco-Prussian War, but in less than a century Germany had lost all. The Austrians in 1914 could not subdue the Serbs, so the empire and its monarchical form of government were lost. The Germans and Japanese after 1939 and astounding initial successes were reduced to ruin.

But even the winners are losers.

Americans won the Mexican War and acquired the southwestern United States, but that conquest brought with it unfathomable and persistent problems – racial prejudice, discrimination, and an irresolvable problem of immigration and border insecurity. Americans likewise won the falsely justi-

fied Spanish American war and acquired a number of colonial states but were unable to hold most of them. The allies won the Second World War, but France and England lost the colonies they were fighting to preserve, and these two powers, which were great before the war, were reduced to minor status (although both still refuse to admit it). Israel has won five wars against various Arab states since 1948, but its welfare and security have not been enhanced, and Arab hatred and intransigence has grown more common.

People need to realize that after a war, things are never the same as they were before, and that even the winners rarely get what they fight for. War is a fool's errand in pursuit of ephemera.

At the end of World War II, American leaders wrongly assumed that America's superpower status gave it the means to impose its view of what the world should be like on others everywhere. Then came Korea and the assumption proved false. Despite all of the destruction and death inflicted on the North Koreans, their attitudes went unchanged. The lesson went unlearned. It

went unlearned again in Viet Nam, after which Henry Kissinger is reported to have naively said, "I could not believe that a primitive people had no breaking point." The Vietnamese never broke. Now again Americans are foolishly assuming that the peoples of the Middle East will change their attitudes if enough force is imposed for a long enough time and enough promises of a better future are made. History belies this assumption.

Unfortunately, history teaches its lessons to only those willing to learn, and the American oligarchy shows no signs of having such willingness.

So let's start singing *Bye-bye, Miss American Pie*

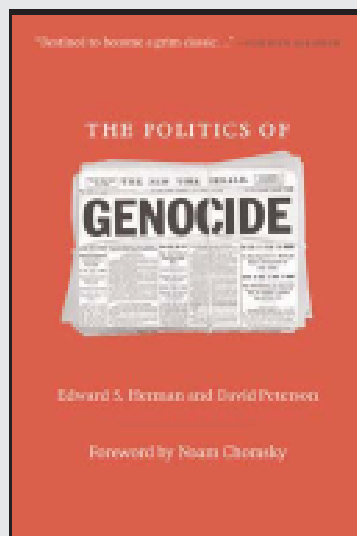
Warring is nothing but a bad way to die!

CT

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who writes on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the US Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer. Find his work at www.jkozy.com

MR

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Inside the strange world of Steve Forbes

David Michael Green comments on the misguided political writing of a former presidential candidate

He's telling us that the president who opened up massive tracts of offshore areas for private sector (read BP) oil extraction in unprecedented quantity, location and scope is a lockstep adherent of Marx and Lenin

Sometime presidential candidate and full-time lunatic Steve Forbes recently wrote a column on “Obama’s Soft-Core Socialism”.

In case the title wasn’t already enough to knock you off your chair and have you rolling on the floor laughing, consider the big ol’ photo that leads in the article. Is it of Barack Obama, the subject of the piece? No, it is not. Is it a picture of Steve Forbes, the author of the essay? No, I’m afraid it isn’t. Instead, it’s yet another obligatory hagiographic rendering of Saint Ronald the Raygun, complete with jaunty smile, plastic Gumby hairdo, and obligatory American flag in the gauzy background. How very... er, relevant. Check my math, would ya, but wasn’t it thirty years ago that this guy was elected president? Before cell phones and CDs, let alone MP3s? And wasn’t Reagan the dude who tripled the national debt, shredded the Constitution, and began the process of cutting the legs out from underneath the American middle class?

As if this isn’t bizarre enough, consider Forbes’s title and thesis. He’s arguing that the guy who threw massive mountains of taxpayer money at Wall Street banks to save them from collapse because of the bad casino capitalism bets they had made is a socialist. (Actually, Forbes is not quite so sure – like many apoplectic freaks on the right, he simultaneously wants to call Obama a fascist too, and sorta does so.) He’s arguing that

the guy whose health care solution involves forcing thirty to forty million Americans to buy crappy expensive insurance from private companies who provide absolutely no value added in the delivery of a crucial product is a socialist. He’s telling us that the president who opened up massive tracts of offshore areas for private sector (read BP) oil extraction in unprecedented quantity, location and scope is a lockstep adherent of Marx and Lenin.

It’s really quite breathtaking. If we hadn’t learned already (and almost no one in the Democratic Party or the American public seems to have) just how insidiously ingenious and recklessly disingenuous these monsters on the right are when it comes to the art of political framing, it would otherwise be tempting to conclude that people like Forbes must be snorting enough cocaine every day to launch a herd of elephants into space and park them in low earth orbit. That’s how paranoid they are.

The piece is riddled with more bad lies than a local Rotary Club golf tournament – after a liquid lunch – and is packed with more stupidity than a truckload of Texas state GOP party platform photocopies coming back from Kinko’s. But the line that really caught my eye was this one: “The truth is that not even the Franklin Roosevelt Administration was as hostile to and ignorant about free enterprise as this Administration

is. Almost every action Obama officials take underscores their belief in the stereotype that businesspeople are mostly amoral, corner-cutting, consumer-shafting, pollution-loving menaces.”

Clearly, Steve Forbes and I read different newspapers. I mean that both literally and figuratively. But it might be more accurate to say that we live in different countries. His is America The Beautiful. Mine is Embarrassica The Mutilated.

I’m sure there are tons of good-hearted small business men and women out there, trying to do an honest day’s work for an honest day’s wage, and serving their communities in every way they can (in fact, there happens to be someone just like that living in my house). But the big business corporate actors who meet such a description may well be as rare as a fundamentalist preacher who would actually be going to heaven, if there was such a thing. Even if they’re not polluting or scamming or downsizing the rest of us with wild abandon, at a minimum these corporate porkers all seem to be lobbying the government (or, what used to be called ‘buying Congress’) for subsidies, tax exemptions and deregulation, at the expense of the rest of us.

In Steve Forbes’ America The Beautiful, these corporations are “doing god’s work” as the astonishingly oblivious Lloyd Blankfein described his Goldman Sachs cancer – er, corporation. They’re waging battle against the government which seeks to take away all our freedoms. Well, not quite all, of course. For example, the freedom to breathe clean air, eat safe foods, drink clean water, maintain our health, keep our pensions, receive a pathetic minimum wage, work in a safe place, etc.

In my Embarrassica The Mutilated, on the other hand, corporations and the associated plutocracy of the über-wealthy in this country form an economic dictatorship of unparalleled greed, power and arrogance. Nor am I alone in this regard, and nor is this exactly a flash headline shouting out breaking news.

In fact, this is a very old story, and I’m

keeping some pretty good company in retelling it. This guy called Jefferson that you might have heard of once said, “I hope we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations which dare already to challenge our government in a trial of strength, and bid defiance to the laws of our country”. I don’t remember seeing that in my sixth grade civics textbook for some odd reason, but that does not diminish the significance of the sentiment. The same might be said of that Madison dude’s observation that, “The growing wealth acquired by [corporations] never fails to be a source of abuses”.

Or there was Andrew Jackson’s take on this question (thanks to Thom Hartmann for collecting these): “The question is distinctly presented whether the people of the United States are to govern through representatives chosen by their unbiased suffrages or whether the money and power of a great corporation are to be secretly exerted to influence their judgment and control their decisions.”

Or Grover Cleveland’s: “As we view the achievements of aggregated capital, we discover the existence of trusts, combinations, and monopolies, while the citizen is struggling far in the rear or is trampled to death beneath an iron heel. Corporations, which should be the carefully restrained creatures of the law and the servants of the people, are fast becoming the people’s masters.”

Or Teddy Roosevelt’s: “Behind the ostensible government sits enthroned an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people. To destroy this invisible government, to befoul the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of the day.”

I haven’t even included FDR’s impassioned eloquence on the subject, Lincoln’s complaints about banks that he feared more than the Confederate Army, or Dwight (career military man, five-star general, commander of the Normandy invasion, Supreme Commander of NATO, Republican, conservative) Eisenhower’s famous invocation against the all-consuming power of the military-indus-

In Steve Forbes’ America The Beautiful, these corporations are “doing god’s work” as the astonishingly oblivious Lloyd Blankfein described his Goldman Sachs cancer – er, corporation

EGO AND INK

Does the wisdom of these former presidents or the pathetically mild scolding that occasionally emerges from the current one require such a lengthy leap of logic to comprehend?

trial complex.

In fact, against the authors of these passages, the actions and rhetoric of Barack Obama look ridiculously tame, passive and corporately compromised by comparison. Which means that, according to the ‘thinking’ of Steve Forbes – notwithstanding his widespread fame as a profound philosopher and saint-like man of unbridled compassion – Jefferson, Madison, Jackson, Lincoln, Cleveland, Eisenhower and both Roosevelts were even bigger socialist-fascist-whatever-label-paranoid-freaks-will-come-up-with-next than you know who – Commissar Trotsky’s just-activated sleeper agent currently ensconced in the White House. Golly, that seems like an awfully big collection of revered and iconic Americans to lump out there in the radical left. By the time you get done dynamiting these traitors’ faces off of Mount Rushmore, only Washington would remain (and maybe he said the same sort of things too, for all I know). I know it sounds preposterous, but it almost seems that the problem isn’t so much that all of America is way out on the left as it is that people like Steve Forbes are way out there on the right (and, Steve, just so you know – that’s what we mean by the word ‘fascist’).

And, really, does the wisdom of these former presidents or the pathetically mild scolding that occasionally emerges from the current one require such a lengthy leap of logic to comprehend?

I mean, what would happen if, for example, Mr. Forbes poked his head out from behind the *Wall Street Journal*, or the magazine produced by the empire he valiantly pulled himself up by his bootstraps from to inherit from his father, only to read just the few reports of corporate predation still available in the rest of the (largely corporate) media? What might he observe there?

Maybe he’d read about the nice folks on Wall Street who crashed the economy of the entire globe by taking outrageous risks with other people’s money, knowing that if their bets went bad the taxpayers and the hated government would ride to their rescue, a

hundred pennies on the dollar, and they’d continue to make record salaries and bonuses while nearly one out of five Americans left in the wake of their disaster can’t find a job.

Maybe Mr. Forbes would see the same articles I’ve been seeing about British Petroleum, and its completely unmatched record for greed and disregard of worker and environmental safety that led to producing a series of catastrophes, culminating (we hope) in the Gulf oil spill, the worst environmental disaster in American history.

What if he were to read “Gulf of Mexico Has Long Been Dumping Site” in the *New York Times*, which notes that “at least 324 spills involving offshore drilling have occurred in the gulf since 1964, releasing more than 550,000 barrels of oil and drilling-related substances. Four of these spills even involved earlier equipment failures and accidents on the Deepwater Horizon rig. Thousands of tons of produced water – a drilling byproduct that includes oil, grease and heavy metals – are dumped into the gulf every year.” The article also describes how “Even the coast itself – overdeveloped, strip-mined and battered by storms – is falling apart. The wildlife-rich coastal wetlands of Louisiana, sliced up and drastically engineered for oil and gas exploration, shipping and flood control, have lost an area larger than Delaware since 1930. ‘This has been the nation’s sacrifice zone, and has been for 50-plus years,’ said Aaron Viles, campaign director for the Gulf Restoration Network, a nonprofit group. ‘What we’re seeing right now with BP’s crude is just a very photogenic representation of that.’”

Perhaps Mr. Forbes would read the investigative piece revealing that “Millions of Americans are being duped by life insurance companies that have figured out a way to hold onto death benefits owed to families. MetLife and Prudential lead the way in making hundreds of millions of dollars in secret profits every year on money that belongs to relatives of those who die, an investigation by *Bloomberg Markets* magazine found. Among the people being tricked are parents and spouses of US soldiers killed in battle in

Iraq and Afghanistan.” The scam is to issue a fake checkbook to beneficiaries, rather than the payout they are owed. The insurance companies then pay the families a whopping 0.5 percent interest on the funds, keeping five to ten times that amount for themselves on all the returns harvested from investing those dollars. Such patriotism, eh? Support Our Troops! Don’t forget your yellow ribbon sticker!

Maybe Steve Forbes could take a gander at Bob Herbert’s recent column, detailing how corporations are doing great right now, in part because they’re holding onto gobs of cash rather than hiring workers or paying a decent wage to the ones they’ve got. “They threw out far more workers and hours than they lost output,” said Professor [Andrew] Sum. ‘Here’s what happened: At the end of the fourth quarter in 2008, you see corporate profits begin to really take off, and they grow by the time you get to the first quarter of 2010 by \$572 billion. And over that same time period, wage and salary payments go down by \$122 billion.’ ... As Professor Sum writes in a new study for the labor market center, this period of economic recovery ‘has seen the most lopsided gains in corporate profits relative to real wages and salaries in our history.’”

And while he’s at it, perhaps Mr. Forbes might want to take a look at the country that’s been created by thirty years of bowing to the interests of corporations and other oligarchs, as institutionalized by the Washington whores of both parties whom they’ve purchased to do their bidding.

The US median wage is the same as it was decades ago, and even fell during the Bush years. Today the richest one percent of Americans take home almost a quarter of all income in the country, just like it was in the good old days of 1928, but way up from the less than 10 percent they got in the pre-Reagan years. Meanwhile, millionaires realized a growth in their wealth of fifteen percent last year, rather a different experience than most of the rest of us, I’d say, especially the more than 15 million unemployed people, along

with another ten million who either work part-time or have quit looking for work altogether, not to mention the 39 million people in this country who are chronically poor and do not have enough food to eat, or the 47 million without health insurance.

This is just for starters. We could go on and on here. There doesn’t appear to be any bottom to the well of greed. It is the Tragedy of the Commons cranked up on a killer cocktail of amphetamines, steroids and radioactive pellets.

Our greed seems entirely boundless. Good luck to any geese out there who lay golden eggs, or for that matter geese of any kind. Or the ground they walk on. Or the rivers they drink from. Or the air they breathe. Is there not a way that’s been found yet to commoditize and profitize air? If they can’t sell it, some good folks will at the very least insist on getting rich polluting it.

This society has just lost its way. But looking at its history of stealing land from Native Americans and then abusing them, slavery, prison labor, oppression of women and minorities, and neocolonialism throughout the developing world, it may be that it never did know its way – or at least a decent, humane way. It just seems so much more grim today.

Today we raise our children with the sort of values that make them (and especially us) seem as though they were never raised at all. Gimme-gimme greed is an embarrassing attitude associated with toddlers. Oh, and adult Americans. Bullying exploitation is a shameful behavior generally left behind on the playgrounds of junior high. Unless, of course, you’re a corporate CEO or a leader in American government. Lying is something people are supposed to learn to stop doing when they’re kids. Unless you’re a regressive, that is.

Plutocratic plunderers just can’t seem to wreck this world, its people, and the planet which sustains us all fast enough. We are now rapidly reaching the natural limitations of such exploitation, and the planet is beginning to bite back.

If we’re lucky, people will too.

CT

Perhaps Mr. Forbes might want to take a look at the country that’s been created by thirty years of bowing to the interests of corporations and other oligarchs, as institutionalized by the Washington whores of both parties whom they’ve purchased to do their bidding.

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

Rebranding Iraq

Wars are won, missions are accomplished, troops are withdrawn, but nothing really changes, writes **Ramzy Baroud**

Will the US military now stop chasing after perceived terrorist threats? Will it concede an inch of its unchallenged control over Iraqi skies?

The soldiers of the US 4th Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division hollered as they made their way into Kuwait. “We won,” they claimed. “It’s over.”

But what exactly did they win? And is the war really over?

It seems we are once again walking into the same trap, the same nonsensical assumptions of wars won, missions accomplished, troops withdrawn, and jolly soldiers carrying cardboard signs of heart-warming messages like “Lindsay & Austin ... Dad’s coming home.”

While much of the media is focused on the logistics of the misleading withdrawal of the “last combat brigade” from Iraq on August 19 – some accentuating the fact that the withdrawal was happening two weeks ahead of the August 31 deadline – most of us are guilty of forgetting Iraq and its people. When the economy began to take center stage, we completely dropped the war off our list of grievances.

But this is not about memory, or a way of honoring the dead and feeling compassion for the living. Forgetting wars leads to a complete polarization of discourses, thus allowing the crafters of war to sell the public whatever suits their interests and stratagems.

In an August 22 *Washington Post* article entitled “Five myths about the Iraq troop

withdrawal”, Kenneth M Pollack unravels the first “myth”: “As of this month, the United States no longer has combat troops in Iran.” Pollack claims this idea is “not even close” because “roughly 50,000 American military personnel remain in Iraq, and the majority are still combat troops – they’re just named something else. The major units still in Iraq will no longer be called “brigade combat teams” and instead will be called “advisory and assistance brigades”. But a rose by any other name is still a rose, and the differences in brigade structure and personnel are minimal.

So what if the US army downgrades its military presence in Iraq and re-labels over 50,000 remaining soldiers? Will the US military now stop chasing after perceived terrorist threats? Will it concede an inch of its unchallenged control over Iraqi skies? Will it relinquish power over the country’s self-serving political elite? Will it give up its influence over every relevant aspect of life in the country, from the now autonomous Kurdish region in the north all the way to the border with Kuwait in the south, which the jubilant soldiers crossed while hollering the shrieks of victory?

The Iraq war has been one of the most well-controlled wars the US has ever fought, in terms of its language and discourse. Even those opposed to the war tend to be misguided as to their reasons: “Iraqis need to

take charge of their own country”; “Iraq is a sectarian society and America cannot rectify that”; “It is not possible to create a Western-style democracy in Iraq”; “It’s a good thing Saddam Hussein was taken down, but the US should have left straight after”. These ideas might be described as “anti-war”, but they are all based on fallacious assumptions that were fed to us by the same recycled official and media rhetoric.

It’s no wonder that the so-called anti-war movement waned significantly after the election of President Barack Obama. The new president merely shifted military priorities from Iraq to Afghanistan. His government is now re-branding the Iraq war, although maintaining the interventionist spirit behind it. It makes perfect sense that the US State Department is now the one in charge of the future mission in Iraq. The occupation of Iraq, while it promises much violence and blood, is now a political scheme. It requires good public relations.

The State Department will now supervise future violence in Iraq, which is likely to increase in coming months due to the ongoing political standoff and heightened sectarian divisions. An attack blamed on al-Qaeda in an Iraqi army recruitment center on August 17 claimed 61 lives and wounded many. “Iraqi officials say July saw the deaths of more than 500 people, including 396 civilians, making it the deadliest month for more than two years,” reported Robert Tait on Radio Free Europe.

Since the March elections, Iraq has had no government. The political rift in the country, even among the ruling Shi’ite groups, is large and widening. The disaffected Sunnis have been humiliated and collectively abused because of the misguided claim that they were favored by Saddam. Hate is brewing and the country’s internal affairs are being handled jointly by some of the most corrupt politicians the world has ever known.

Washington understands that it needs to deliver on some of Obama’s many campaign promises before the November elec-

tions. Thus the re-branding campaign, which could hide the fact that the US has no real intention of removing itself from the Iraq’s military or political milieu. But since the current number of military personnel might not be enough to handle the deepening security chaos in the country, the new caretakers at the State Department are playing with numbers.

“State Department spokesman P. J. Crowley said [a] plan would bring to some 7,000 the total security contractors employed by the government in Iraq, where since the 2003 US invasion private security firms have often been accused of acting above the law,” according to Reuters.

It’s important that we understand the number game is just a game. Many colonial powers in the past controlled their colonies through the use of local forces and minimal direct involvement. Those of us oppose the Iraq war should do so based on the guiding principle that foreign invasions, occupations and interventions in sovereign countries’ affairs are a direct violation of international law. It is precisely the interventionist mindset that must be confronted, challenged, and rejected.

While it is a good thing that that thousands of American dads are now coming home, we must also remember that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi moms and dads never did. Millions of refugees from the US-led invasion are still circling the country and the Middle East.

War is not about numbers and dates. It’s about people, their rights, their freedom and their future. Re-branding the army and the war will provide none of this for grief-stricken and vulnerable Iraqis.

The fact is, no one has won this war. And the occupation is anything but over. **CT**

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His latest book is *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza’s Untold Story* (Pluto Press, London), available on Amazon.com.

Since the March elections, Iraq has had no government. The political rift in the country, even among the ruling Shi’ite groups, is large and widening

Freedom and illusion

Fred Reed remembers a time when kids weren't so coddled by parents and authorities

When I wanted to go shooting, I put my rifle, a nice .22 Marlin with a ten-power Weaver, on my shoulder and walked out the main gate

When I was a kid long, long ago, before time began, or anyone had thought of why time ought to begin, or what it might be good for, I lived in rural King George County, Virginia. The county bordered on the Potomac River and was mostly woods. Dahlgren Naval Proving Ground, on which my family lived, sloped down to Machodoc Creek, perhaps three-quarters of a mile wide.

Things were looser then. When I wanted to go shooting, I put my rifle, a nice .22 Marlin with a ten-power Weaver, on my shoulder and walked out the main gate. At the country store outside the gate I'd buy a couple of boxes of long rifles, no questions asked, and away my co-conspirator Rusty and I went to some field or swamp to murder beer cans.

Today if a kid of fifteen tried it, six squad cars and a SWAT team would show up with sirens yowling, the kid's parents would be jailed, the store closed and its proprietors imprisoned, and the kid subjected to compulsory psychiatric examination. Times change.

In King George if a buddy and I wanted to go swimming, we might go to the boat dock, which was for public use, and jump in. We did this by day or night. Almost never were there other people around, certainly no lifeguard. Or we might take my canoe, bought with paper-route money, and paddle out

into the nighttime water and glory in being young and free and jumping overboard to swim. No one thought anything of it. It was what kids did.

Today, unsupervised swimming is everywhere forbidden. Worse, swimming at night, hundreds of yards from shore. In a canoe without flotation devices approved by the Coast Guard. No supervising adult? No proof of having taken a governmentally approved course in how to paddle a canoe? Impossible in these over-protected, vindictively mommified times.

We saw no need of flotation devices because we were flotation devices. We could swim, easily, fluently, because we had been doing it forever. I don't think I knew anyone who couldn't have swum the width of Machodoc. Nobody supervised us. Nobody thought we needed supervision. And we didn't.

If we wanted to fish, an urge frequently upon us, we just got our poles and did. We caught mostly cat, perch, and bream and the occasional wildly combative eel. Adults had nothing to do with it. We didn't need fishing permits. Nor did we need help.

What I didn't notice then, but remember now, is that we didn't look nervously about to see whether our elders might disapprove. We knew they wouldn't. We were fishing. So what?

The whole world worked that way – un-

supervised, unwatched, left alone. In winter the Cooling Pond on base froze deep, and way after dark fifty of us would sail across slick new ice on skates, unsupervised. Adults skated, but they were skaters, not Mommy. And if you wanted to stay late till you were the only one on the (huge) pond, sailing fast, ice hissing under blades, not tired because you are sixteen and don't know what the word means – you did. No supervision.

The boys had cars. The county being mostly empty, we spent endless nights driving, driving, to Fredericksburg to get Might Mos at Hojos, or just putting miles behind us on winding roads through the woods, alone, with friends, with our girls.

What I remember is how free we were. Solzhenitsyn once told of stopping on some desert desert highway, getting out of his car, and marveling that no one knew where he was, or cared. That's how it was in King George. You parked with your girlfriend for endless hours on some blind pull-off into the woods. No one asked where you had been or what you were doing or, more likely not doing. Parents didn't care because they didn't need to care.

In retrospect, it felt unregulated. And was. In today's world of over-policing by militarized hostile cops, of metal-detectors and police in schools and compulsory anger-management classes and enforced ingestion of Ritalin or Prozac, King George sounds, well, dangerous. I mean, how can you let kids run around as they like, with... with ... guns, (eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeek!) and beer, and unregistered canoes without supervision by a caring adult, and...?

The answer of course is that we supervised ourselves. Within limits, anyway. I do remember lying on the roof of my father's station wagon and looking up at the brake pedal because I hadn't taken that unbanked downhill S-turn on Indian Town Road quite as well as I had planned.

But, being Southern kids, we boys knew how to handle guns, and the girls knew how to handle us, and though the country boys were physically tough from doing real work

(consult a history book), we were not crazy in the head. To the extent that adolescents are willing to be, I guess we were happy. We just didn't know it.

The wretchedness we see today – the kid who shoots ten classmates to death, the alleged students strung out on crystal meth, the suicides, the frequent pregnancies – just didn't happen. Why? Because (I strongly suspect) we were left the hell alone. The boys were allowed to be boys and the girls, girls. We grew like weeds, as our natures directed, and so did not have anorexia or bulimia or the sullen smoldering anger that comes of being a guy kid forced to be a girl or androgyne or flower.

I cannot speak well for the girls, except to say that they were sane, good-natured, and splendid. I do know that the boys needed, as plants need sunlight, to take canoes up unknown creeks, to swim and bike and compete – without a caring adult. In fall we used to play hours of pick-up basketball at the base gym – unsupervised. The brighter of us read voraciously. Some took up ham radio or read physiology texts. But we needed physical exertion, adventure, and freedom.

We had them. The consequence? Our heads were screwed on right. We probably even thought that the world looked to be a good place for a while. Although the entire high school had easy access to fire arms, nobody ever shot anyone. The idea would have seemed lunatic. In rare fights, boys might punch each other in the nose. Pick up a tire iron? Kick the other guy in the head? Not a chance.

The foregoing will enrage the whole sodden bolus of therapists, psychological beard-scratchers, counselors, feminists, fruit-juice drinkers, and congenitally insecure promoters of sun block. But it worked. **CT**

Fred Reed has worked on staff for Army Times, The Washingtonian, Soldier of Fortune, Federal Computer Week, and The Washington Times. His web site is www.fredoneverything.net

Being Southern kids, we boys knew how to handle guns, and the girls knew how to handle us

Who is talking about what matters?

Danny Schechter wonders why job losses and foreclosures don't seem as important to the US media as a 'Ground Zero Mosque'

Who is beating the drum for job creation and a new economic policy? Maybe the unions, but their voice is muted and ignored in the electronic noise machine

We know we live in hard times that are on the verge of getting harder with 500,000 new claims for unemployment one week last month, a recent record.

The stock market may be over for now as fear and panic drives small investors out. Big corporations hoard stashes of cash rather than hire workers. The D-Word (depression) is back in play.

Foreclosures are up, and the Administration's programs to stop them are down, well below their stated goals, only helping 1/6th of those promised assistance.

And here's a statistic for you: 300,000. That's the number of foreclosure filings every month for the past 17 months. This year, 1.9 million homes will be lost, down from 2 million last year. Is that progress? In July alone, 92, 858 homes were repossessed.

At the same time, the number of cancelled mortgage modifications exceeded the number of successful ones. According to Ml-implode.com "the number of trial modification cancellations surged to 616,839, greatly outnumbering the 421,804 active permanent modifications."

And don't think this is only a problem that affects the homeowners about to go homeless. The *New York Times* quotes Michael Feder, the chief executive of the real estate data firm Radar Logic to the effect

that we are all at risk.

"My concern is that if we have another protracted housing dip, it's going to bring the economy down," Mr. Feder said. "If consumers don't think their houses are worth what they were six months ago, they're not going to go out and spend money. I'm concerned this problem isn't being addressed."

The larger point is that even if you believe the economy is already down, it can go lower. No one knows how to "fix it" either just as BP couldn't plug the "leak" that, truth be told, is still oozing oil.

So what are we doing about it? Are we demanding debt relief or a moratorium on foreclosures? Are we shutting down the foreclosure factories?

Nope.

Progressives are spending time and wasting passion debating an Islamic Cultural Center near Ground Zero, invariably responding to the provocations and agenda of adversaries. They are always on the defense, never taking the offense.

Who is beating the drum for job creation and a new economic policy? Maybe the unions, but their voice is muted and ignored in the electronic noise machine.

Meanwhile, even as the Administration seems to be finding signs of a "recovery," a parade of failures march on from the discovery that there is an oil slick the size of Manhattan in the Gulf to the persistence of

frauds in finance from state pension funds in New Jersey to the case against the head of the Bank of America.

Even worse, Shorebank, one of the banks that community activists considered a national model of social responsibility has gone down in Chicago, the 104th bank to fail this year with 15 branches including some in Detroit and Cleveland. It was also active in 40 countries. In June, it reported over \$2 billion in deposits. By August, it was gone.

In all, 349 US banks have disappeared since 2007.

ShoreBank promoted itself as a community development and environmental bank. It was based in Michelle Obama's old neighborhood with the slogan "Let's Change The World." Now the world of Wall Street has changed the bank with a partnership of investors including American Express, Bank of America and Goldman Sachs taking over under the name "United Partnership."

Hundreds of other banks are on the FDIC hit parade and may be next.

There were many worse casualties in banking in the past according to Barry James Dyke's informative book, *Pirates of Manhattan*. He notes that ten thousand banks failed during the depression and 2,900 bit the dust in the S&L crisis. The current number may have been higher had Congress not bailed out the Banksters who used some of our money to play PacMan, gobbling up smaller institutions.

AP reported, "ShoreBank lost \$39.5 million in the second quarter amid soured real estate loans. The bank had been under a so-called cease and desist order from the FDIC for more than a year, requiring it to boost

its capital reserves. ShoreBank was able to raise more than \$146 million in capital this spring from several big Wall Street institutions. It was unable, however, to secure federal bailout funds it sought from the Treasury Department's Troubled Asset Relief Program."

Republicans are "investigating" alleged Administration support for the Bank,

AP explained, "Rep. Darrell Issa of California, the senior Republican on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, sent a letter to a White House legal adviser asking specific questions on possible contacts between administration officials and executives of ShoreBank or potential investors.

The White House has said no administration officials met with ShoreBank concerning its rescue or requested help from financial institutions on its behalf."

Questions raised by Republicans, of course, seek to politicize the issue when it is the FDIC's deal with the big banks that needs to be probed, as Zero Hedge explains: "As it stands, Goldman and 11 other banks are receiving a multimillion dollar gift to conduct a portfolio liquidation run-off of ShoreBank's assets, while merely making sure existing deposits are serviced."

(Note: the FDIC is led by a Republican. Hmm.)

Blogger Mike, "Mish" Shedlock concludes: "The FDIC's handling of Shore Bank smells as bad as a pile of dead alewives on a Chicago beach in mid-July"

My question is: Why didn't the Administration help shore up ShoreBank (if it could be shored up) as they did so many of the

If they don't have the guts to save a bank in their own hometown they know has meant so much to so many, is it any wonder they won't take on the crimes on Wall Street?

READ THE BEST OF TOM ENGELHARDT
<http://coldtype.net/tom.html>

ECONOMIC AMNESIA

If they don't have the guts to save a bank in their own hometown they know has meant so much to so many, is it any wonder they won't take on the crimes on Wall Street?

"too big to fail" banks?

Their hands-off attitude, perhaps in fear of being criticized, as they were anyway, helped doom the bank and, by extension, the idea that we could have socially responsible lending institutions.

So much for the priorities and power of Obama's "Chicago Mafia."

If they don't have the guts to save a bank in their own hometown they know has meant so much to so many, is it any wonder they won't take on the crimes on Wall Street?

Last month, Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner was complaining that he is being falsely identified as a "Goldman Guy," insisting he never worked for the financial institution that was recently branded a "Giant Squid On The Face Of Humanity."

He doesn't seem to realize that the speculation is not based on the details of his resume but on an assessment of his track record as a toady for the pals he worked with when he ran the Federal Reserve Bank in New York.

And by the way, Tim, why the hold – up on the appointment of Elizabeth Warren to run the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in your old institution? Is she too smart and popular for you?

Why the fiddling while our modern Rome burns? **CT**

News Dissector Danny Schechter directed *Plunder The Crime of Our Time*, a DVD and a companion book, *The Crime Of Our Time on the financial crisis as a crime story*. Comments to: dissector@mediachannel.org

BENDIB'S WORLD

Khalil Bendib



Ecocide in paradise

British MP **Michael Meacher** says the media miss the point about oil drilling, and that it's time for a complete shift from fossil fuels if we want to avoid more disasters such as the BP oil spill

The media got the story wrong. They reported that BP had been forced to withdraw from new oil drilling in the Arctic. They miss the point. The real news is that drilling is being permitted in the Arctic region at all. It shouldn't be.

The lesson of the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster ought to have been an accelerated global shift away from fossil fuels, particularly oil, on the grounds that remaining global supplies of oil are limited, they are increasingly found in inaccessible areas that are difficult and expensive to penetrate, and the untrammelled oil binge is incompatible with stopping climate disaster.

Sheikh Yamani, the former Saudi oil Minister, memorably said that the Stone Age didn't end for lack of stones; it ended because human beings found a better way. We should do so again – energy saving, energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy – not glut on oil which threatens global war as scarcity grows as well as ecological and climate destruction. Fat chance.

The world's governments and the world's media still don't 'get it'. The whole mindset of capitalism and of contemporary civilisation is relentless exploitation to the point of supply exhaustion, geological irrecoverability, or loss of market profitability.

It points up three flaws in the human condition: the over-mighty power of the oil, gas and coal lobbies to push their interests virtually without check; the feebleness and indeed unwillingness of governments to regulate them; and the deep reluctance of people everywhere to make sacrifices in changing a lifestyle they're addicted to.

It is disreputable that James Watt, the evangelical

nutter under Bush, sanctioned opening up the US pristine wilderness in the north-western states to oil exploration – on the grounds that the Second Coming was so close it wouldn't matter!

It is equally disreputable that Obama opened up US waters in the Arctic to oil drilling just before the Deep-water Horizon blow-out which forced him temporarily to backtrack, but he is now going ahead again because the US Geological Survey believes there could be 90 billion barrels of oil there as well as 50 trillion cubic metres of gas.

Now China, the new world super-power, is stepping into America's shoes. In a story the Western media didn't even bother to report, the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government has suddenly amended its Environment Act which previously put 97% of land in PNG under communal tenure in order to provide an important social safety net against resource corruption.

Then without consultation, on 27 May 2010, the PNG government introduced emergency legislation that dissolved the constitutional rights of all landowners in PNG, including the right of indigenous people to own land, challenge resource projects in court and receive any compensation for environmental damage. The bill was passed without being seen or debated by parliamentarians.

Why? Because of growing Chinese control over the PNG government. **CT**

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WRITING WORTH READING

ColdType

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