

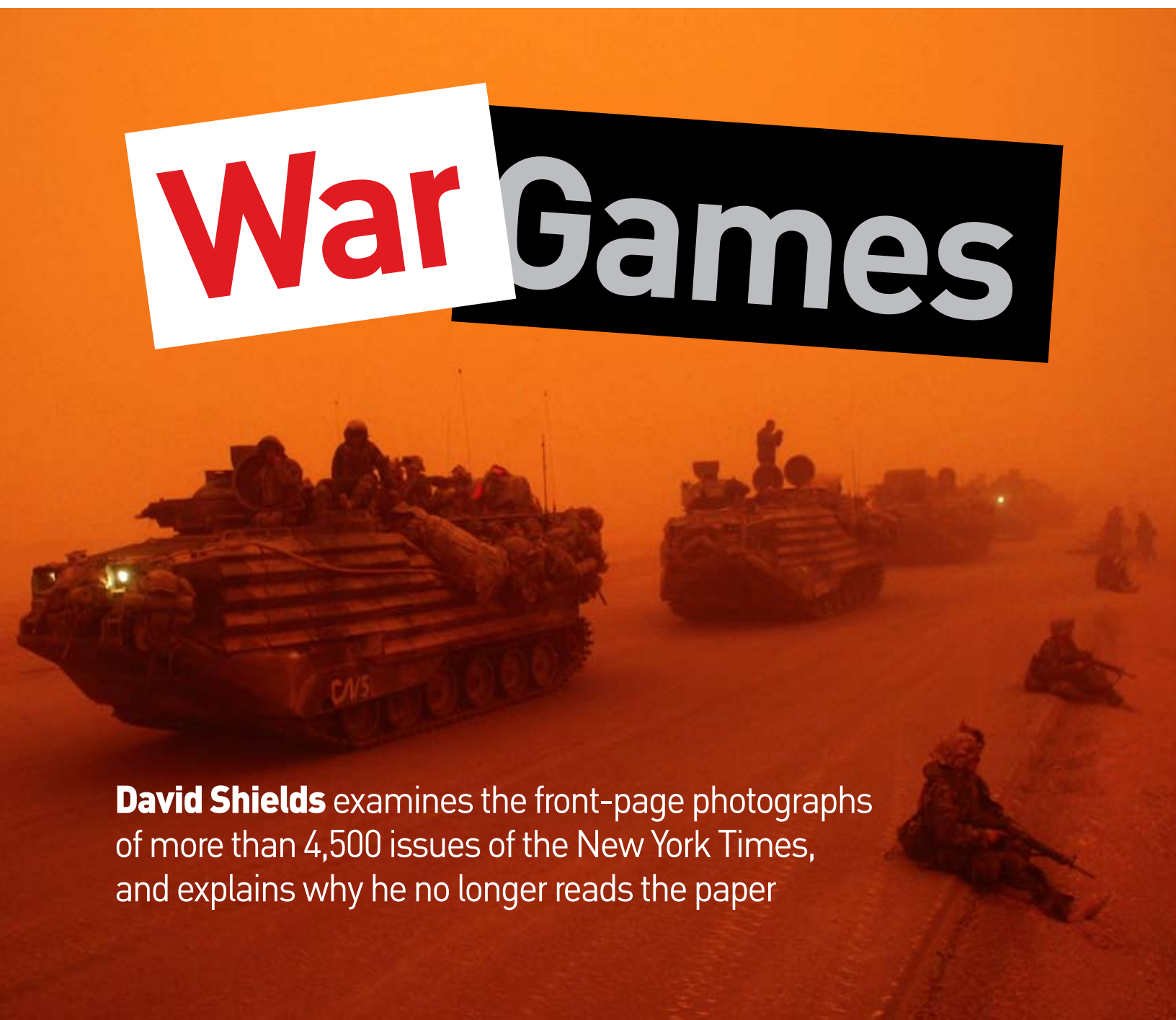
**STRANGER THAN STRANGELOVE** | PAUL LASHMAR  
**'ARE THEY GOING TO KILL ME?'** | FRIDA BERRIGAN  
**GOING DOWNHILL FAST** | GEORGE MONBIOT

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 110

## War Games



**David Shields** examines the front-page photographs of more than 4,500 issues of the New York Times, and explains why he no longer reads the paper



**Cover:**

*Ozier Muhammad, NYT/Redux  
(see Page 28)*

# ColdType

Issue 110 / January 2016

- 
- |     |                                     |                |
|-----|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| 3.  | <b>STRANGER THAN DR STRANGELOVE</b> | PAUL LASHMAR   |
| 6.  | <b>'ARE THEY GOING TO KILL ME?'</b> | FRIDA BERRIGAN |
| 11. | <b>A HELPING HAND</b>               | CAROLYN COE    |



- |     |   |                                |
|-----|---|--------------------------------|
| 14. | <b>GOING DOWNHILL FAST</b>                        | GEORGE MONBIOT & RICHARD SCOTT |
| 18. | <b>A NEW McCARTHYISM</b>                          | DAVID CROMWELL & DAVID EDWARDS |
| 25. | <b>THE GIRL WHO TALKED TOO MUCH</b>               | DELL FRANKLIN                  |
| 28. | <b>WAR GAMES</b>                                  | DAVID SHIELDS                  |
| 33. | <b>THE CURIOUS LOGIC OF THE POLICE STATE</b>      | MATTHEW HARWOOD                |
| 39. | <b>HOW BRITAIN IS HELPING TO STRANGLE YEMEN</b>   | DANIEL MARGRAIN                |
| 42. | <b>THE 2015 AWARDS FOR STUPIDITY</b>              | CONN HALLINAN                  |
| 45. | <b>RAMPING UP FOR A NEW COLD WAR</b>              | ERIC MARGOLIS                  |
| 47. | <b>TOP EDITOR WAS AN APARTHEID SPY</b>            | TIM KNIGHT                     |
| 50. | <b>PATRON-SAINT-TO-BE OF CROOKS AND CRIMINALS</b> | EAMONN McCANN                  |
| 52. | <b>TRUMP: VULGAR, CRUDE, RACIST. AND CORRECT!</b> | WILLIAM BLUM                   |
| 55. | <b>SYRIA EXPLAINED IN 300 WORDS</b>               | PHILIP KRASKE                  |

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# Stranger than Strangelove

**Paul Lashmar** reveals how the US planned for nuclear war in the 1950s

**T**hose who have written about the nuclear Cold War remain grateful to Stanley Kubrick for giving us the satirical 1964 film *Dr Strangelove* which captures the madness that swept the world for 40 years. The name *Strangelove* may be overused, but the United States has now released a secret file that really does justify the sobriquet: “Stranger than *Strangelove*.” Almost anodyne in title, the Atomic Weapons Requirements Study for 1959 is a truly shocking document, revealing the scale of the holocaust that would have been unleashed in a nuclear war.

But a little context first. Back in 2006, Michael Dobbs, then a journalist with the *Washington Post*, filed requests for the declassification of many Pentagon Cold War documents. Dobbs optimistically hoped these documents would illuminate his book, *One Minute To Midnight*, about the Cuban Missile Crisis. After years in the review system, 2,200 documents were released in October 2014 – and with Dobbs’ help, the not-for-profit National Security Archive in Washington DC (not to be confused with the National Security Agency) has been working on the bundle ever since.

The archive has recently released its assessment and the highlights are that major cities in the Soviet Bloc, including East Berlin, were high priorities for “systematic destruc-

tion” in a nuclear attack and that H-bombs were to be used against priority “air power” targets in the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe. The report also found that plans to target people (“population”) were in violation of international legal norms.

The Strategic Air Command Atomic Weapons (SAC) Requirements Study for 1959, originally produced in June 1956, provides the most comprehensive and detailed list of nuclear targets and target systems that has ever been declassified. This 800-page study, is unprepossessing, a list of geographical locations in the communist bloc and then a corresponding series of alpha numerical descriptors which reflect the targets.

Under the leadership of Dr William Burr, who specialises in nuclear history and who has been doing remarkable re-

**Secret files show how the US planned to wipe out Soviet cities**



**The Vulcan bomber, backbone of Britain’s nuclear bombing force in the ’50s and early ’60s.**

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## BOMB CRAZY

**I recall one pilot I interviewed, Colonel Sam Myers, revealing for the first time his target, “OK, my target for my crew was Gorky. And, this involved airborne alert missions. And we did have full weaponry aboard”**

search for the archive since the 1980s, a team cross-indexed the descriptors with other documents to build up a picture of where the US Air Force (USAF) would have delivered its nuclear payload.

According to Burr, as far as can be told, no comparable document has ever been declassified for any period of Cold War history. It is still partly redacted. SAC specified the numbers and types of nuclear weapons required to destroy each Designated Ground Zero (DGZ). The nuclear weapons information is completely excised from the report, making it impossible to know how many weapons SAC believed were necessary to destroy the targets. Nevertheless, the SAC weapons stockpile was increasingly rapidly at the time, from more than 2,400 in 1955 to more than 12,000 in 1959. It was to reach 22,229 in 1961.

Even after this length of time, the SAC study provokes a frisson. According to its authors, their target priorities and nuclear bombing tactics would expose nearby civilians and “friendly forces and people” to high levels of radioactive fallout. What’s more, the study’s authors developed a plan for the “systematic destruction” of Soviet bloc urban-industrial targets that specifically and explicitly targeted “population” in all cities, including Beijing, Moscow, Leningrad (now St Petersburg), East Berlin, and Warsaw.

“It’s disturbing, for sure, to see the population centres targeted,” writes Burr, adding, “Whatever SAC planners had in mind, attacks on civilian population per se were inconsistent with the standards followed by air force leaders. While they were willing to accept mass civilian casualties as a consequence of attacking military targets, as was the case during the Korea War, they ruled out ‘intentional’ attacks on civilians... Moreover, attacks on populations violated international legal norms of the day, which were summarized in the then-unratified Hague rules on aerial warfare (1923)”.

It is worth remembering that, at this stage of the Cold War, the attacks would

have been carried out by human beings in long-range jet bombers rather than missiles. Every SAC crew was given a nuclear target in the Soviet Union in case of war.

In the 1990s, I interviewed many SAC pilots about dropping nuclear weapons on cities. They dealt with this remarkably pragmatically, as military people do. They viewed it as a patriotic duty or as a job of work, retrospectively providing a successful deterrent. My questions stirred little reflexivity or rumination. I recall one pilot I interviewed, Colonel Sam Myers, revealing for the first time his target, “OK, my target for my crew was Gorky. And, this involved airborne alert missions. And we did have full weaponry aboard.”

Another target set was of urban-industrial areas identified for “systematic destruction.” SAC listed more than 1,200 cities in the Soviet bloc, from Estonia to China, all given graded priorities. Moscow and Leningrad were unsurprisingly Priority 1 and Priority 2. Moscow included 179 DGZs and Leningrad had 145 – including “population” targets. In both cities, SAC identified air power installations, such as Soviet Air Force command centres, which it would have eliminated with thermonuclear weapons early in the war. The main priority air-power targets would have been chosen from 1,100 airfields across the Soviet bloc starting with long-range Soviet air force nuclear bomber bases.

According to the study, they would have been targeted with bombs ranging from 1.7 to nine megatons. The document batch shows that SAC wanted a 60-megaton weapon which it considered vital for deterrence and also because it would produce “significant results” in the event of a Soviet sudden attack. Burr points out that one megaton would be 70 times the explosive yield of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

### Overkill

It has long been known that many targets would have been subjected to multiple nu-

clear attacks – which led to the expression “Overkill.” But the study suggests the actual overkill would have been greater than previously believed. The SAC’s preference for ground-burst detonation of nuclear weapons rather than exploding them in-air would have been far dirtier, and had such an attack taken place it would have greatly contaminated the earth’s atmosphere.

It is now hard to recall the constant fear in the ordinary person’s mind during the Cold War. But it is worth remembering that for many years this was symbolized by the huge B52 nuclear laden bombers that SAC kept in the air 24-hours-a-day, ready to attack the communist bloc.

This approach to defence was very much the vision of one man, the head of SAC from 1948 to 1957, General Curtis LeMay. Before LeMay took over, SAC had 49,589 personnel with just 713 World War II aircraft. By 1955, purely by the force of LeMay’s personality, this had grown rapidly to 200,000 personnel and 3,068 aircraft, mostly jet bombers.

SAC had forward bases around the world forming an “iron ring” around the Soviet Union. Britain, “the unsinkable aircraft carrier,” provided one of SAC’s key bases. LeMay is widely believed to have been the model for General Jack D. Ripper in Dr Strangelove.

Two decades ago, I revealed that LeMay ran his own agenda in the 1950s of trying to provoke the Soviet Union into nuclear confrontation. Fortunately for us, it was one of his few failures.

The consequences of such a nuclear attack would have been beyond the imagination: One estimate is that it would have killed 520-million people in the Communist bloc alone.

### **Need to know**

It is not clear how the RAF’s Bomber Command nuclear V-bomber force was integrated into the US’s war plans. It is a sad fact that the UK does not have an organisation comparable to the National Security

Archive that has the resources to take an opaque document like the study and reveal the significance of its content.

There is much more to discover; for instance, the intelligence gathering operation that must have taken place to identify the 1,100 air bases in the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies and the many other installations referred to, in what was a hermetically sealed bloc at that time. In the UK, much intelligence-based material is still classified.

Virtually no post-World War II MI6 material has been released into the National Archives at Kew. Some MI5 material has been released recently. Many of these files have come from a government secure depot at Hanslope Park. In 2013 it was discovered that the Foreign Office had unlawfully hoarded more than a million files of historic documents that should have been declassified and handed over to the National Archives. The Foreign Office claimed they had been mislaid from government archive records.

These included a substantial number of MI5 documents. It will take the National Archives at least 10 years to release them into the public domain. Those that have already been released are fascinating and include the personal files of double agent Guy Burgess. Also released recently have been MI5 files and documents on public figures such as the author Doris Lessing, historian Christopher Hill, moral philosopher Mary Warnock and historian Eric Hobsbawm.

But we know little about how the UK might have worked with its NATO allies in a nuclear war, which, thanks to the analysis of these declassified documents, we now have a much clearer picture of. **CT**

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*Paul Lashmar is a senior lecturer in journalism at the University of Sussex. His book: *Spy Flights of the Cold War*, was published in 1996 by Sutton Publishing. This article was first published at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

**In 2013 it was discovered that the Foreign Office had unlawfully hoarded more than a million files of historic documents that should have been declassified and handed over to the National Archives**

# 'Are they going to kill me?'

**Frida Berrigan** searches for answers to the questions kids ask as they inhabit an increasingly frightened, locked-down planet

**I just couldn't square my son's loving exuberance and confidence in the people around him with the sheer, teeth-hurting terror of children being stalked by an armed killer through the halls of his school**

**W**hat did you do at school today, Seamus?" It's a question I ask him everyday.

"Well," my proud preschooler begins, "we did not have a lockdown drill today." And that's about as far as he gets in the art of storytelling. Sometimes I'll get something about "bim" (gym) or how "Bambi" (Jeremy) pinched him during free play. But the thing that preoccupies my precocious three-year-old every single day he goes to school is the lockdown drill he and his classmates had in their first month of school.

At a parent-teacher conference in November, my husband Patrick and I got a fuller picture of this episode from his teacher. When the lockdown began, she says, Seamus and his classmates were in the hall on their way to the library. Amid the clangs, they sought refuge in the gymnasium closet. Eighteen kids and two teachers sitting crisscross applesauce on its floor amid racks of balls and hula hoops. Seamus, she tells us, sat on her lap with his fingers in his mouth and cried the entire time.

"Does he talk about it at home?" she asks.

"It's as though nothing else happens at school," my husband replies. "He talks about lockdown drills all the time."

She informs us that the drills happen

about once a month, and that Seamus remains easily startled long after they're over, running for shelter between an adult's legs whenever he hears loud noises in the classroom.

At that moment – not exactly one of my proudest – I burst into tears. I just couldn't square my son's loving exuberance and confidence in the people around him with the sheer, teeth-hurting terror of children being stalked by an armed killer through the halls of the Friendship School. How, after all, do you practise for the unthinkable? This is a subject that's been on my mind since I was hardly older than he is now. I look over at him playing contently with his sisters, Madeline, almost two, and Rosena, almost nine, so proud to share his classroom with them.

"At home," I tell the teacher through my tears, "we chant 'Gun Control, Not Lockdown Drills!' whenever he talks about them." And then I add, "It makes me so angry that he and his friends have to go through this trauma and the big men get to keep their right to bear assault weapons. He should be scared of lockdown drills. They sound terrible. He shouldn't have to practise surviving a mass killing episode at one of his favorite places in the whole wide world." I wipe my tears away, but they just keep coming.

Our kids ask us all sorts of questions.



**Taking cover, but from what? Pupils hide beneath their desks during a school drill.**

Photo: Nekotune (via flickr.com)

**I came to believe that the only thing keeping Soviet and American intercontinental ballistic missiles from decimating our cities was the activism, organizing, and witness of my parents and their small band of friends and fellow traveler**

Why? Why? Why? They are tiny existentialists. Why is the sky blue? Why do people die? Why does grass grow? They regularly demand that we explain the world to them. Good luck!

His teacher is so earnest and so young, and I feel so brittle and so extreme as I cry, folded into one of the small seats at a quarter-sized table in her cheerful classroom. “I am sorry,” I finally say.

“No, no, it’s okay,” she replies with all the kind politeness a teacher learns. “It is hard,” she continues, “but this is real. We have to practise for this kind of thing.”

### **Thinking the unthinkable**

I wonder, of course. I know that so much of this is based on fears – not quite irrational, but blown out of all proportion – that have been woven into our American world. My husband reminds me of how his parents’ generation had to practise surviving a nuclear attack by doing “duck and cover” drills under their desks. I was too young to duck and cover, but my parents were ar-

dent anti-nuclear activists with no inhibitions about describing to a child just what such a war would mean, so I learned to be terrified of nuclear war at a very young age.

I came to believe that the only thing keeping Soviet and American intercontinental ballistic missiles from decimating our cities was the activism, organizing, and witness of my parents and their small band of friends and fellow travellers. We would stand in front of the Pentagon – this was in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s – holding up signs with slogans such as “You can’t hide from a nuclear bomb” and the old symbol for a fallout shelter printed below it. I was taught that there could be no security, no safety in a world full of nuclear weapons, that the only way to be safe was to get rid of them.

Imagine how I feel all these years later in a world still chock-a-block full of such weapons. These days, I wonder why the fear of them has disappeared, while the weaponry remains. Is that better or worse

**I could tell you why kids were hungry all over the world, since my mom had tacked on a conclusion to the slide show that lay the blame squarely on the US military-industrial complex**

for Seamus's generation? And what about our present set of fears? What about our 21st-century whys?

Assuming there are more Adam Lanzas (the Sandy Hook killer) out there (and there obviously are), that more gun shops will sell ever-more implements of rapid-fire death and destruction, and that more gun lobbyists and promoters will continue to cling to this "God-given, constitutionally enshrined right," my son does need to endure more lockdown drills.

The consensus of school security experts is certainly that the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut (only 80 miles from our house), would have been much worse if the students and teachers hadn't been practicing for exactly the nightmare scenario that struck on December 14, 2012.

But how can I explain any of this to my little boy when it makes no sense to me? When it makes no sense, period?

Why? Why? Why? As a kid, I got an earful every time I asked that question. My parents were comfortable exposing my brother, sister, and me to the horrors of our world. In first or second grade, my activist parents involved me in a UNICEF slide show about world hunger. We would go to churches and schools where I would recite the script, full of sad (and still, sadly, largely on the mark) statistics about how children throughout the world suffer from malnutrition. I could tell you why kids were hungry all over the world, because my mom had tacked on a conclusion to the slide show that lay the blame squarely on the US military-industrial complex.

My parents did, however, try to protect me from what they found most fearsomely destructive in American life. We were not allowed to watch television, except for the evening news (somewhat less hysterical than today, but no less bleak). Like any self-respecting American kid, I would always ask, "Why no TV?" and always get

the same answer. "Because it teaches racism, sexism, and consumerism, because it fills your head with wants, because it gets in the way of your own imagination and creativity."

So instead of Knight Rider or the Cosby Show, we watched black-and-white documentaries about Hiroshima and Nagasaki projected onto our living room wall. I couldn't tell you about the latest plot twists on Full House, but I could tell you why nuclear weapons were wrong. Those grainy images of destroyed cities, burnt skin, and scarred faces were etched into my young brain by the age of five. My heroines were two young anti-nuclear activists. Sadako Sasaki was a Japanese girl who contracted leukemia after the atomic bombing. She folded hundreds of paper cranes as a prayer for healing and peace before dying at the age of 12. Samantha Smith, a young girl from Maine, wrote to Soviet leader Yuri Andropov with a plea for peace. He, in turn, invited her to tour the Soviet Union, where she connected deeply with young Russians. She died in a plane crash at the age of 13.

I wonder now about my childhood fears. They helped me support and believe in the anti-nuclear work of my parents. But nightmares, morbid fascinations with young martyrs, a fixation on the tick-tockings of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock – these are not things that I want to pass on to the next generation. I guess I'm happy that they don't know what nuclear weapons are (yet), and it's one more thing I'm not looking forward to explaining to them.

The questions are already coming fast and furious these days, and they are only going to multiply. We have to try – I have to try – to answer them as best we – I – can. It's a precious facet of parenting, the opportunity to explain, educate about, and even expound upon the wonders and horrors of this world of ours, and it's a heavy responsibility. Who wants to explain the



hard stuff? But if we don't, others surely will. In these early years, our kids turn to us first, but if we can't or won't answer their questions, how long will they keep asking them?

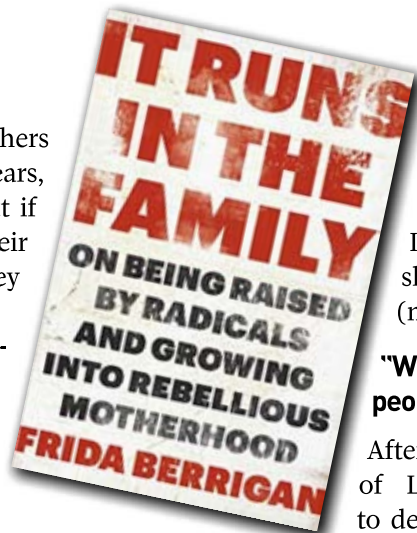
Why do we practise lockdown drills? Why do people kill kids? Why is there war? Why are all those weapons, the nuclear ones and the assault rifles alike, still here?

At some preschools, it's protocol to explain lockdown drills in terms of preparing in case a stinky skunk gets into the building. No one wants to get sprayed by a stinky skunk, do they? Somehow, and I can't tell you quite why, this seems to me almost worse than the

truth. At Seamus' school, they don't talk explicitly about an armed intruder, but they do make a distinction between fire drills where they evacuate the building and "keeping safe from a threat" by "hiding" in it.

In the month since our parent-teacher meeting, Seamus has endured another lockdown drill and our country has continued to experience mass shooting events – San Bernardino and Colorado Springs being just the most horrific. While at breakfast, Patrick and I read the news about healthcare offices and social service agencies turned into abattoirs, and yet we speak about such things only in code over granola and yogurt. It's as if we have an unspoken agreement not to delve into this epidemic of gun violence and mass shootings with our kids.

Still, it's strange not to talk about this one subject when we talk openly in front of our children about so much else: Iraq and Afghanistan, the Syrian refugee crisis, hunger and homelessness, Guantánamo and climate change. We usually welcome their whys and jump over each other to



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explain. Patrick is much better at talking in a way that they can all take in. I forget myself easily and slip into lecture mode (next slide, please).

**"Why do the police kill people?"**

After the police killings of Lashano Gilbert (tased to death in our town of New London, Connecticut), Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray, we took the kids to candlelight vigils and demonstrations, doing our best to answer all Seamus's questions. "Why do the police kill people?" followed, of course, by "Are they going to kill me?"

Then we somehow had to explain white privilege to a three-year-old and how the very things that we encouraged in him – curiosity, openness, questioning authority – were the things black parents were forced to discourage in their sons to keep them from getting killed by police.

And then, of course, came the next inevitable "Why?" (the same one I'm sure we'll hear for years to come). And soon enough, we were trying desperately to untangle ourselves from the essentially unintelligible – for such a young child certainly, but possibly the rest of us as well – when it came to the legacy of slavery and racism and state violence in explaining to our little white boy why he doesn't need to cry every time he sees a police officer.

And then came the next "Why?" and who wouldn't think sooner or later that the real answer to all of his whys (and our own) is simply, "Because it's nuts! And we're nuts!" I mean, really, where have we ended up when our answer to him is, in essence: "Don't worry, you're white!"

And then, of course, there's the anxiety I have about how he'll take in any of this

**Where have we ended up when the answer to our son's questions about police killings is, in essence: "Don't worry, you're white!"**

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## GROWING PAINS

**Then there are those lockdown drills. They couldn't be creepier. They're a reminder that we may indeed be living in a kind of war zone**

and how he might talk about it in his racially diverse classroom – the ridiculous game of “telephone” that he could play with all the new words and fragments of concepts rattling around in his brain.

My stepdaughter Rosena was a kindergartner when Adam Lanza killed those 20 little kids and six adults in their school just 80 miles west of us. Her school upped its security protocols, instituted regular drills, and provided parents and caregivers with resources on how to talk to their children about what happened. For five- and six-year-olds, they advised not initiating such a conversation, nor allowing them to watch TV or listen to the radio news about the massacre. (Not exactly the easiest thing in our 24/7 media moment.) They also suggested responding to questions only in the most general terms. Basically, we were to sit tight and hope our kids didn't get enough information to formulate a why.

Good luck on that these days, but sometimes I do wish the same for myself. No news, sit tight, and pretend nothing's going on. After all, like so many of our present American fears, the fear that my kids are going to be gunned down in their classrooms is pretty irrational, right? Such school shootings don't exactly happen often. Just because one did occur relatively near here three years ago doesn't mean pre-schools and elementary schools are systematically under attack, yes?

Unlike so many people on this planet, we don't live in a war zone (if you put aside the global destructiveness of nuclear weapons). And given the yearly figures on death-by-vehicle in this country, my kids are unbelievably safer in school, any school, than they are in the back seat of my own car any day of the week, right?

Of course, there's another problem lurking here, and it's mine. I'm not there. My three-year-old son is having scary experiences, and I'm not there to walk him

through them. And then there are those lockdown drills and what they are preparing him for. They couldn't be creepier. They're a reminder that, after a fashion, we may indeed be living in a kind of war zone. In 2013, according to the Centers for Disease Control, 33,636 people were killed by guns in this country; in that same year, 127 American soldiers were killed in Afghanistan.

### **Some questions are easier than others**

Why is the sky blue? I have no idea, but it takes only a minute of Googling to find out that it has something to do with the way air molecules scatter more blue light than red light. Why do people die? Because no one can live forever, because they get sick and their bodies get old and their organs don't work any more and then we cry because we miss them and love them, but they live on, at least until our own memories go. Why does grass grow? Well, Google it yourself.

The problem, however, is with the most human of questions, the ones that defy Googling and good sense – or any sense we may have of the goodness of humanity. And maybe, kids, we just have to wrestle together with those as best we can in this truly confusing world. And keep one thing in mind: The very same litany of questions our kids never stop asking and that we struggle to answer, or wonder whether to answer at all, is always running like some strange song through our own adult heads as well, largely unanswered.

Why this particular world? Why this particular way? Why now?

Why? Why? Why?

**CT**

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*Frida Berrigan, writes the Little Insurrections blog for WagingNonviolence.org She is the author of It Runs In The Family: On Being Raised By Radicals and Growing Into Rebellious Motherhood, and lives in New London, Connecticut. This essay was first published at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)*

# A helping hand

**Carolyn Coe** travels to Kabul to help distribute duvets to Afghan women



**Bearing quilted bed covers, Afghans walk through the cemetery to their mountainside homes**

**T**hey have descended from homes built on the mountainside. Women sit together in the cemetery not to mourn, but to wait for the duvet distribution to begin. When I approach them, each woman extends a hand in greeting. Some have the small stamped pieces of paper that they need to receive two duvets, but most don't. One of the women tells me about the pain in her chest and her legs. She talks about the

war. I listen to all the manifestations of her suffering, understanding only a handful of words. But, as she clasps my hand, I know she wants my help in receiving a pair of duvets, too. I tell her I don't make any decisions here, but it is the elder representative of the neighbourhood who determines who receives the quilted bed covers. Standing with the women, I say "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." All other words fail me.

**I know she wants my help in receiving a pair of duvets, too. I tell her I don't make any decisions here, but it is the elder representative of the neighbourhood who determines who receives the quilted bed covers**

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## AFGHAN AID

**A balloon seller approaches. A boy wheels a cart of apples nearby. Where a crowd gathers, there's a potential sale, but no one is buying. So the sellers observe the scene, as I do**



**Safeh Zakira stands with her youngest daughter, aged 5.**

Someone calls me over to the truck, as the distribution will soon begin. In the Afghan gesture of greeting and leave-taking, I place my right hand over my heart and say goodbye.

A balloon seller approaches. A boy wheels a cart of apples nearby. Where a crowd gathers, there's a potential sale, but no one is buying. So the sellers observe the scene, as I do. Colourful duvets, like clouds enveloping the bearers, seem to float by. I take a photo of a pair of girls. They become my shadow, following me and asking for more pictures.

The truck piled high with duvets is in a narrow, gated car park. Perhaps twice as many people arrive as have the needed pieces of paper. The crowd presses towards the open gate, hoping. I see one

of the volunteers at work. Abdulhai has just finished 12th grade and is one of the founding members of the Afghan Peace Volunteers with a gift for crowd control. Instead of pushing the crowd back with outward facing palms, he smiles and snaps his fingers so the children laugh. He speaks kindly and softly. Children and adults stop trying to edge forward, at least while he's there. Their shoulders relax. Some return smiles.

It isn't that they want to be there, Abdulhai says a couple of nights later about those who show up without a ticket. The people are desperate. Understanding without judgment seems the key to Abdulhai's gentle effectiveness.

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Safeh Zakira is one of 60 women sewing for this winter's duvet project of the Afghan Peace Volunteers. She says she wants to continue sewing. Before this work, she would sometimes break the shells of almonds, using them as fuel. I wonder how much heat such shells can generate, then learn her family also heats with coal. She lifts her hands. They are covered in coal dust.

Her husband is a labourer, laying mud on walls. Most days he can't find work., but when he does, his average pay is 300 Afghanis a day. In the winter he earns less, 200 Afghanis. So many are seeking work that employers take advantage of the situation. Officially, Afghanistan has 40 per cent unemployment, but the unofficial estimate is higher – more than 80 per cent.

Safeh Zakira's family lives in a rented home that costs 2,500 Afghanis a month. They also pay 500 to 1,000 Afghanis a month for water. I think of her coal-covered hands, the cost of water.

Along with the finished duvets, she arrived today with a bag of the remainder material. (The cover fabric, polyester stuffing and thread were all issued a week earlier.) I remark on this act of returning

the extra stuffing. Honesty is important, she says.

Zakira learned about the duvet project from her neighbor. She asked where this place was and took the initiative to come and ask to be involved. A team of Afghan Peace Volunteers visited her home to survey her situation and gave her employment.

Another woman, standing nearby, said she was hoping to sew, too, but when she got here she learned the project was already full. Ali, a student volunteer, took her name so that the volunteers can help her in some other way. She will receive a duvet. I worry about the investment in taxi fare as she traveled for an hour to get here. Fortunately, the fare is by trip, not by the number of passengers, so she didn't lose money. Zakira is given money for transportation as well as for the sewing, and the women travelled together.

She says she hopes there will always be work for her, not just with this winter's duvet project. What the people need, she says, is work so that they can provide for their families.

Aaron Hughes, of Iraq Veterans against the War, leads a pair of art workshops. The workshop has two rules.

First, if you get paint on your fingers, you can't touch your clothes.

Second, there is no mixing of colors, so a potato dipped into the red paint shouldn't later be dipped in the green or orange paint.

Rule 2 is blissfully ignored.

Not following the rules is how they have survived.

More than 20 child labourers have joined the afternoon workshop. One boy shows me the design he has printed from potatoes cut into the shape a leaf and a star. The boy names his flower design in English and asks me how it is.

"Maqbool," I answer. "Beautiful."



Asma added a red potato print to her page.

Later, he approaches me holding a relief print in each hand, eager for more praise.

Listen for the chuh-chuh-chuh, Aaron Hughes says, imitating the sound the roller makes when it is sucking up blue paint. He directs Imam, another boy at the street kids school, to make sure the roller catches the corners of the linoleum. Imam's eyes brighten as he lifts the paper to reveal his self portrait.

In less than an hour, the children have gone through 100 sheets of paper, which they've spread out on the grass to dry. A few girls and boys walk between the designs, leaning over to pick some up for a closer look before turning their gaze to others. It is as if they are smelling flowers.

**CT**

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**Carolyn Coe** is part of a *Voices for Creative Nonviolence* – [www.vcnv.org](http://www.vcnv.org) – delegation to the Afghan Peace Volunteers ( [www.ourjourneytosmile.com](http://www.ourjourneytosmile.com) ) in Kabul. She lives in Maine.

**One boy shows me the design he has printed from potatoes cut into the shape a leaf and a star**



# Going downhill fast

**George Monbiot** tells how public money and crazy policies speed water off the land and into British homes. Photos: **Richard Scott**

**When heavy rain falls, some land must flood. We have a choice – fields or cities – and all over Britain, we have chosen badly**

**D**ecember's floods in Britain were not just predictable. They were predicted. There were clear and specific warnings that the management of land upstream of the towns now featuring in the news would lead to disaster.

On December 9, one of my readers told me this: "I live in the middle of Foss drainage board land above York, where flooding would not harm a single property, but water is sent down as fast as possible to York." A few days later, another reader wrote, warning that, "upstream flood banks now protect crops, not the City of York." On December 26th, the River Foss exploded into York.

It's a complaint I've heard repeatedly: Internal drainage boards, that are public bodies, but tend to be mostly controlled by landowners, often prioritize the protection of farmland above the safety of towns and cities downstream. By straightening, embanking and dredging rivers where they cut through fields, drainage boards accelerate the flow of water, making flooding downstream more likely. When heavy rain falls, some land must flood. We have a choice – fields or cities – and all over Britain we have chosen badly.

For several years, campaigners in Hebden Bridge have been begging the govern-

**Washed-out. The flooded Rver Ouse in York.**



ment to stop the drainage and burning of the grouse moors upstream. Eighteen months ago, I visited the Yorkshire town, where activists told me that, thanks to the damage inflicted on the bogs and deep vegetation of the moors, which reduces their capacity to hold water, it was only a matter of time before Hebden Bridge was wrecked again by flash floods. Their warnings were not just ignored, but – if such a thing is possible – actively disregarded.

### **Grouse moor prosecution**

In 2002, Walshaw Moor, a 6,500-acre grouse shooting estate upstream of Hebden Bridge, was bought by the retail tycoon Richard Bannister. Satellite images before and after show a transformation of the land: a great intensification of burning and draining. These activities raise the number of grouse, which in turns raises the amount (running into thousands of pounds per person per day) that people will pay to shoot them.

In 2011, the government body Natural England did something very rare: It launched a prosecution of the estate, citing “illegal works” on the moor. The estate was charged with 45 offences, 30 of which involved building allegedly unauthorized drainage channels. It denied all criminal activity. In 2012, as Mark Avery documents in his book, *Inglorious*, something very odd happened. After £1m had been spent on the case, it was suddenly dropped. Instead, Natural England struck an agreement with the estate, under which the owner of Walshaw Moor would be given £2.5-million of public money, in the form of a special package of enhanced farm subsidies, to carry on more or less as before, without reversing the allegedly illegal works.

Avery’s freedom of information requests, seeking to discover why this astonishing reversal took place, have been repeatedly blocked, so there is no definitive explanation. But we know that the minister responsible at the time, Richard Benyon, is himself

**Activists told me that, thanks to the damage inflicted on the bogs and deep vegetation of the moors, which reduces their capacity to hold water, it was only a matter of time before Hebden Bridge was wrecked again by flash floods**

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## UNDER WATER

● See more of Richard Scott's flood photographs at [www.flickr.com/photos/rjscott](http://www.flickr.com/photos/rjscott)



**The British government wants to deregulate dredging and channel clearance, to allow farmers to shift water off their land more quickly**

a grouse moor owner, and was lobbied over this period by the Moorland Association, which represents other grouse moor owners. We have no way of knowing whether these facts are related, and I cannot make a direct connection between the management of Walshaw Moor and the flooding of Hebden Bridge. But there's little doubt that the management of grouse moors tends to increase the risk of flooding.

Though grouse moors stretch the definition of agricultural land to the breaking point, they remain eligible for public money in the form of farm subsidies. In 2014, as essential public services were hacked back, the government quietly raised the money to which they are entitled by 84 per cent. Maximizing the number of grouse means treating the moors as if they were giant chicken runs, draining the land, eradicating predators and competitors and burning the heather to stimulate the young shoots on which grouse feed. If the people downstream are flooded

out their homes, who cares?

Similar irrationalities abound. Farm subsidies everywhere are conditional on the land being in "agricultural condition." This does not mean that any actual farming has to take place there, only that it looks like farmland. Any land covered by "permanent ineligible features" is disqualified. What does this mean? Wildlife habitat. If farmers don't keep the hills bare, they don't get their money. Scrub, regenerating woodland, forested gullies, ponds and other features that harbour wildlife and hold back water must be cleared. European rules insist that we pay farmers to help flood our homes.

### Deregulating dredging

The British government wants to deregulate dredging and channel clearance, to allow farmers to shift water off their land more quickly. It was instrumental in destroying the proposed European Soil Framework Directive, which would have



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## UNDER WATER



York after the rain.  
Previous page:  
flooded pub.  
Far left: Wading  
though the water.  
Left: Temporary  
parking.  
Below: Rescued  
from the river.



reduced flooding by preventing the erosion and compaction of the soil.

There are signs that this antediluvian thinking is beginning to shift. Rory Stewart, the Environment under secretary and minister in charge of floods, once mocked the organizations seeking to hold back water on farmland rather than letting it rush into homes. But last month he told the Today programme that we need more trees in the hills and should let our rivers meander once more. It was so welcome and surprising that it felt like a parting of the waters.

Building higher walls will not, by itself, protect our towns. We need flood prevention as well as flood defence. This means woodland and functioning bogs on the hills. It means dead wood and gravel banks and other such obstructions in the upper reaches of the streams (beavers will do such work for nothing). It means pulling down embankments to reconnect rivers to their floodplains, flooding fields instead of

towns. It means allowing rivers to meander and braid. It means creating buffer zones around their banks, places where trees, shrubs, reeds and long grass are allowed to grow, providing what engineers call hydraulic roughness. It means the opposite of the orgy of self-destruction that decades of government and European policy have encouraged: grazing, mowing, burning, draining, canalization and dredging.

Natural flood management of this kind does not guarantee that urban floods will never happen, but its absence exacerbates them. Yes, Britain has been hit by massive storms and record rainfall. But it has also been hit by incompetence, ignorance and concessions to favoured interests. This, at least, we can change. **CT**

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*George Monbiot's book, Feral, was recently released in paperback format. This article was published in the Guardian newspaper and at [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)*

**Building higher walls will not, by itself, protect our towns. We need flood prevention as well as flood defence**

# A new McCarthyism

**David Cromwell** and **David Edwards** point out the media hypocrisy surrounding articles posted on the Stop the War Coalition's web site

**"It is de rigeur for Western journalists to point to Russia suffering blowback for its bomb strikes in Syria"**

**M**edia treatment of the term "blowback," the concept that foreign policy has consequences that rebound on its perpetrators, illustrates a fundamental hypocrisy in "the mainstream." It is fine for approved journalists and commentators to use the word when discussing terrorist attacks, actual or feared, here in the West. But abuse and vitriol will be heaped upon the heads of peace activists who dare broach the subject. They are smeared as "victim-blaming."

Consider a few examples of the "approved" discussion of blowback. In the run-up to the parliamentary vote in favour of dropping British bombs on Syria, an editorial in the Independent warned: "First among the qualms felt by the public will be the risk of 'blowback' against Britain in the form of terrorist attacks in this country."

The former UK ambassador to Syria, Peter Ford, told the BBC that if air strikes went ahead (as indeed they did), "The inevitable blowback on our streets will be severe."

In November, Dominic Lawson, far from your archetypal Stop-the-War dissident, warned in the Sunday Times, "When, 14 months ago, Parliament voted to approve RAF activities against ISIS in Iraq alone, this column noted that such activity risked blowback against citizens on British streets without having much military logic." In August 2014, an "analysis" piece on the BBC

News website noted that, "People dismissed the idea that the UK could be a target – until bombs exploded in London on 7 July 2005.

"If, as the graffiti reads, some Brits in Syria regard their mission as pushing the frontier forward [i.e. towards the UK] – security chiefs fear it will only be a matter of time before that threat comes home."

It is also perfectly acceptable in "the mainstream" to write openly about the foreign policy of enemy states inviting blowback. Thus, the Guardian's Iran correspondent recently wrote of the dangers of Iran's "military engagement" in Syria: "From the very start of the Syrian crisis, Iranians have been saying that the militants are being funded by the Wahabi regimes, and that they are extremist in nature, and this will lead to blowback."

And, of course, it is de rigeur for Western journalists to point to Russia suffering blowback for its bomb strikes in Syria. A month before jihadists seemingly brought down a Russian Metrojet full of tourists, the BBC's Jonathan Marcus had written a piece asking whether, "Russia's brutally pragmatic approach to the Syrian crisis" might lead to "blowback for Russia." But we did not see any articles from Marcus asking whether America or Britain's "brutally pragmatic approach to the Syrian crisis" might lead to blowback.

After the Russian Metrojet airliner was

bombed, a Telegraph article asserted: “The need in Russia was to limit the idea that ordinary holiday-makers could have suffered blowback from President Vladimir Putin’s adventures in Syria.”

And a Guardian comment piece noted: “Putin knows that he is facing the blowback for Russia’s assertive, active involvement in Syria and that there may be more to come.”

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, it was even permissible for commentators in the “respectable” media to suggest France had just suffered an example of blowback. Kevin Maguire, associate editor of the Daily Mirror, wrote that, “it would be foolish to ignore the tragic blowback of foreign policy on domestic events.”

A Sunday Times article observed, “Fears of another Charlie Hebdo style incident have grown as France carried out airstrikes against ISIS in Syria and Iraq – some targeting French citizens who had enrolled in the jihadists’ ranks. “It was not a question of whether but of when,” said Nathalie Goulet, a conservative senator. ‘We knew that France would be hit. The only thing we didn’t know was where and when. Our services had been expecting something like this for a long time.’”

### **Thou shalt not say 'reaping the whirlwind'**

So it is fine for politicians and commentators in “the mainstream” to talk of blowback. But when Stop the War published an article by US journalist Chris Floyd on its website – [www.chris-floyd.com/Articles/2531-age-of-despair-reaping-the-whirlwind-of-Western-support-for-extremist-violence.html](http://www.chris-floyd.com/Articles/2531-age-of-despair-reaping-the-whirlwind-of-Western-support-for-extremist-violence.html) – arguing that the Paris attacks were blowback for Western violence inflicted on the Middle East, the organization was subjected to heavy flak, and it took down the article. Titled, “Age of Despair: Reaping the Whirlwind of Western Support for Extremist Violence,” the article presented a reasoned argument, “Without the American crime



**Demonstrator waves a banner at the Stop Bombing Syria protest in London on December 12, 2015.**

Photo: Garry Knight

of aggressive war against Iraq – which, by the measurements used by Western governments themselves, left more than a million innocent people dead – there would be no ISIS, no ‘al Qaeda in Iraq.’ Without the Saudi and Western funding and arming of an amalgam of extremist Sunni groups across the Middle East, used as proxies to strike at Iran and its allies, there would be no ISIS. Let’s go back further. Without the direct, extensive and deliberate creation by the United States and its Saudi ally of a world-wide movement of armed Sunni extremists dur-

**Needless to say, there have been no calls from politicians and commentators to take down earlier, far more outrageous articles - in the Guardian, Daily Mail, The Times, Telegraph and elsewhere**

ing the Carter and Reagan administrations (in order to draw the Soviets into a quagmire in Afghanistan), there would have been no 'War on Terror' - and no terrorist attacks in Paris tonight."

Floyd made clear that he deplored "the depravity displayed by the murderers of innocents in Paris tonight." But the Biblical phrase "reaping the whirlwind" was ripped from the article, losing the vital context in which it was embedded, and flung with anger and vitriol around the internet. One title of a Daily Mail article shrieked, "Corbyn condemned as an apologist for terrorists by LABOUR MPs in row over 'shoot to kill' and cause of Paris atrocity."

Ian Austin, Labour MP for Dudley North, said that those who agreed with Stop the War were, "not just absolving the terrorists of responsibility; they risk fuelling the sense of grievance and resentment which can develop into extremism and terrorism."

Tristram Hunt, the former shadow education secretary, told the BBC Andrew Marr Show that Stop the War had recently made "pretty ugly comments" including "about how the French almost had it coming to them." Stop the War were, he added, "a really disreputable organization," and he called on Jeremy Corbyn to pull out of its Christmas fundraising event (Corbyn went ahead and attended).

During a meeting with Tory MPs, Prime Minister David Cameron called Jeremy Corbyn and his allies "terrorist sympathizers," an appalling remark for which he refused to apologize, despite being challenged numerous times to do so in the House of Commons.

Floyd subsequently wrote about being exploited as a "political football" by warmongers. He stated that he has no association with Stop the War and his article was republished without his knowledge or permission (which he said he would have given, if asked). His piece was, "used by Labour Blairites and Tory twits to bash Corbyn for the 'sickening' article, which showed what

an ungodly radical he really was."

Floyd's words had been, "egregiously mischaracterized not only by the giants of statesmanship in Parliament but also by the founts of savvy wisdom throughout the UK press."

Thus, an article pointing out uncomfortable truths about the consequences of Western policy in the Middle East had been cynically exploited by politicians and journalists who have themselves, in many cases, cheered or even orchestrated one Western bloodbath after another. Needless to say, there have been no calls from politicians and commentators to take down earlier, far more outrageous articles - in the Guardian, Daily Mail, The Times, Telegraph and elsewhere - recklessly calling for illegal and disastrous wars, resulting in huge death tolls and mass suffering. (For the record, this would be an act of censorship and one we would not support).

The 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change: Policy Responses to Protect Public Health presented "a comprehensive account of the vast and continuing human toll of the various 'Wars on Terror' conducted in the name of the American people since the events of September 11, 2001." The West's terrorism, routinely sold as "humanitarian intervention," has killed around a million people in Iraq, 220,000 in Afghanistan and 80,000 in Pakistan. This total of 1.3-million deaths does not even include casualties of Western-supported violence in other war zones, such as Yemen. Indeed, the authors stress that the death toll is a "conservative estimate." As for the financial cost of these wars, that has been at least \$3-trillion. One might think all of this would weigh heavily on the consciences of the laptop bombardiers promoting perpetual war who appear far more troubled by articles published on a small website run by Stop The War.

More recently, a second article was published, and then removed, from the Stop the War website. Matt Carr, a fine and cou-

rageous writer, had caused outrage with a piece criticizing Hilary Benn's pro-bombing speech, titled "Mr Benn Goes Bombing." Like Floyd, Carr has no affiliation whatever with Stop the War, whose website simply picked up his blog piece and republished it. Carr rightly condemned Islamic State or Daesh, stating clearly that, "it is certainly a savage and dangerous movement which needs to be defeated. . . it feeds off weak, wrecked, and wartorn societies which have imploded as a result of some of the same wars that "anti-fascists" like Benn once supported."

Then came the words at the core of the second controversy, "Benn does not even seem to realize that the jihadist movement that ultimately spawned Daesh is far closer to the spirit of internationalism and solidarity that drove the International Brigades than Cameron's bombing campaign - except that the international jihad takes the form of solidarity with oppressed Muslims, rather than the working class or the socialist revolution."

This was undoubtedly an ill-judged remark. To suggest, however obliquely, that Daesh, an extremely violent, crazed and oppressive movement, is in "solidarity with oppressed Muslims" was foolish. (Carr later reiterated that he was talking about "the jihadist movement that ultimately spawned Daesh," not Daesh itself). Moreover, predictably, there was outrage among many readers at the perceived, or cynically posited, "moral equivalence" between the international jihadist movement and the International Brigades who fought General Franco's forces in the Spanish Civil War.

However, the ferocity and ugliness of the response from so many politicians and commentators, notably the usual mouthpieces of neocon militarism, to a single comment from a low-profile blogger who is not even part of Stop the War, was deeply cynical. The Daily Mail published a nasty piece, horribly ironic, given its own fascist-supporting past. The extremist right-wing newspaper dishonestly attributed Carr's views to the

"hard left pressure group" Stop the War, saying, "Now Corbyn's friends compare ISIS to heroes who fought Franco."

As ever, an opportunity to smear the new leader of the Labour Party was not squandered.

Following the largely manufactured media and political storm, Carr published an apology. He made this vital point, "I inadvertently provided ammunition to those who are seeking to use the Stop the War movement to undermine Jeremy Corbyn and the movement itself. Such people will always use whatever they can find, and they have played the hand I gave them well."

Last year, as the political writer Ian Sinclair pointed out, Guardian columnist George Monbiot likened George Orwell and the International Brigades to jihadists fighting in Syria in an article titled, "Orwell was hailed a hero for fighting in Spain: Today he'd be guilty of terrorism."

Monbiot gave the example of a British suicide bomber in Syria. "Last week a British man who called himself Abu Suleiman al-Britani drove a truck full of explosives into the gate of Halab prison in Aleppo. The explosion, in which he died, allowed rebel fighters to swarm into the jail and release 300 prisoners. Was it terrorism or was it heroism? Terrorism, according to many commentators."

The suicide bomber had carried out his attack "in the name of the al-Nusra Front, which the British government treats as synonymous with al-Qaeda. But can anyone claim that liberating the inmates of Syrian government prisons is not a good thing?" Monbiot even asked, "Should we not be celebrating this act of extraordinary courage? Had David Cameron not lost the [2013] intervention vote, and had al-Britani been fighting for the British army, he might have been awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross."

With what turned out to be horrible irony, spokesmen for the al-Nusra Front expressed their support for last month's

**To suggest, however obliquely, that Daesh, an extremely violent, crazed and oppressive movement, is in "solidarity with oppressed Muslims" was foolish**

**“To have people on a platform, of whatever nationality, who are for bombing, when you’re trying to build a case against bombing, is really a bit counter-productive”**

terrorist atrocities in Paris. There was zero “mainstream” outrage following Monbiot’s article, then or now. But, of course, this is entirely predictable given that Monbiot’s article did not provide an opportunity for the ruling media and political classes to denigrate an anti-war group associated with a Labour leader who is viewed by them as a terrible threat.

Author Michael Rosen, referring to a Twitter message sent by Stop the War linking to Chris Floyd’s “reaping the whirlwind” piece, summed up powerfully, “When all this is put together by historians, will they say the converse of that whirlwind tweet? Will they say there was no connection whatsoever, not even the tiniest connection? Will they say that these terrorist groups had no connection whatsoever to the wars and interventions of the last 50 years or so? Will the historians say that the only way to understand these terror groups is to examine the sacred texts of Islam? The answer to it all lies in the books? Will they say that the big mistake the Western powers made was to not bomb and kill more and more and more?”

On November 17, just four days after the Paris attacks, Noam Chomsky was asked how Europe should react. As part of his response, he said, “So what were the immediate causes? Well, we don’t know a lot but about the only information we have is the explanation given by ISIS, not only for these acts, but for the blowing-up of the Russian airplane, killing a couple of hundred people in the Sinai. Now they say, ‘Look, if you bomb us we’ll attack you.’ Well, that’s probably the reason.”

Can we imagine any “mainstream” journalist providing such a sane and rational analysis? Viewers would certainly never hear one of the correspondents on BBC News at Ten saying anything remotely like this; it is simply taboo. If corporate news media were capable of fair and impartial coverage, wouldn’t we hear such rational views from journalists at least some of the

time? The silence is a shocking indicator of how the corporate media buries understanding, thus making future terrorist attacks more likely.

**“It is the war party that has a reputation problem, not Stop the War”**

When Caroline Lucas, the Green MP and former leader of the party, resigned recently as a patron of Stop the War, it provided further media opportunities to heap pressure on the anti-war coalition. Her spokesperson said she was resigning because of her busy schedule and “in light of some recent StWC positions that she didn’t support,” adding, “Caroline was specifically troubled by some Stop the War Coalition statements after the Paris atrocities. Though the pieces were subsequently taken down she felt unable to associate herself with them.

“She was also concerned that some Syrian voices were not given an opportunity to speak at a recent meeting organized by the StWC in Parliament.”

However, it turned out that these Syrian voices belonged to a group, Syria Solidarity UK, which supports bombing in Syria. As Middle East political writer Asa Winstanley pointed out: “@CarolineLucas Why on earth would you expect @STWuk to invite a pro-war group to speak at its meeting?”

Responding to the hostile media coverage about Syrians supposedly being denied an opportunity to speak at this meeting, Andrew Murray, chair of Stop the War, told the Guardian, “Well, in my opinion, a lot of this is just invented as a stick to beat Stop the War with. Of course Syrians have every right to a voice about what should happen in their country, including lobbying for our country to get involved. I don’t want to condemn any Syrian. But to have people on a platform, of whatever nationality, who are for bombing, when you’re trying to build a case against bombing, is really a bit counter-productive.”

It is certainly disappointing that Caroline

Lucas has resigned her position at Stop the War, particularly at the present time when her support is so badly needed.

Meanwhile, prominent Greens Rupert Read and Darren Johnson were among signatories to a letter published in the Guardian attacking Stop the War for having “lost its moral compass and authority” on Syria. Once again, it was effectively a call for more Western bombing in Syria.

As usual, the “impartial” BBC didn’t disappoint. When BBC Newsnight discussed Stop the War on its December 8 program, Newsnight political editor Allegra Stratton described Caroline Lucas as “a fellow traveller” of Jeremy Corbyn – a pejorative term with overtones of McCarthyism that perfectly characterizes the relentless media smearing of Stop the War. Lyndsey German, convenor of Stop the War, described the BBC program as a “very feeble attack” on the organization.

Meanwhile, as some kind of pathetic jape, the Telegraph published a piece titled, “Who said it: Stop the War Coalition or Isil?,” introducing what was clearly meant as a fun quiz, “The anti-war campaign has been accused of being stridently anti-West. Can you tell its statements apart from those of murdering jihadis?”

On December 9, Stop the War issued a strong 10-point response to the ongoing media and political attacks, saying, “It is the war party that has a reputation problem, not Stop the War,” adding, “This smear campaign is being pursued by MPs and journalists to discredit the anti-war case and champion the fourth war on a Muslim country in 14 years.”

As Tariq Ali pointed out in an article in the Independent, “Since Corbyn is a founder member of Stop the War, the propaganda assault is essentially designed to weaken and destroy him.”

While this was welcome fare in the Independent, the supposedly progressive newspaper showed exactly where it stood when it published a ludicrous editorial titled, “Jer-

emy Corbyn should renounce the Stop the War Coalition.” It was riddled with appalling accusations that Stop the War was now “extreme left,” that it was in “a de facto alliance with Bashar al-Assad,” and that it “has been evidently off kilter for some years now.”

Off kilter? How so?

“Whether it be defending Russia’s 2008 war in Georgia, or its annexation of Crimea, or its ongoing covert invasion of eastern Ukraine. Hard left is as hard left does; all too often that means support for Russian policy, never mind that the country is now run by a despot.” The Independent’s editorial concluded that Corbyn has “good reason to step away from a group that has toxified the pacifist cause.”

In response to ugly attacks like this, the Stop the War Coalition published a clear rebuttal, in which it pointed out that, “The StWC has never supported the Assad regime. Just as we never supported the Taliban, Saddam Hussein or Colonel Gaddafi. Only in the minds of ‘them or us’ pretend patriots does the opposition to our own government’s wars mean support for dictators or terrorists. Our case has always been that war will worsen the problem and not solve it. We were right in that analysis in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.”

Likewise, on December 12, John Rees, co-founder of Stop the War, demolished the arguments and smears made by Emma Reynolds, a pro-bombing Labour MP, in a BBC Radio 4 debate. It’s a must-listen clip:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmfBD5cDNJs&sns=tw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmfBD5cDNJs&sns=tw)

### **Ending the plague of terrorism**

On December 11, 2015, the Guardian published a long interview with Stop the War chair Andrew Murray. This was, superficially at least, a more balanced challenge of the organization in comparison to the Independent’s brazen attack (described above). But in classic Guardian fashion, similar charges were smuggled into the piece by its author, John Harris.

Without saying so explicitly, the group

**“Only in the minds of ‘them or us’ pretend patriots does the opposition to our own government’s wars mean support for dictators or terrorists”**

**It is more important than ever to counter the war-mongering rhetoric emanating from the usual state-corporate interests that demand Orwellian perpetual war**

was cast as hard-left; it “draws most of its energy from elements well to the left of his [Corbyn’s] party,” and there were several mentions of the influence, and supposed early domination in Stop the War, of the “Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party.”

Harris described the two articles taken down from the Stop the War website – largely manufactured controversies, as we argued above – and then slipped in his own opinion that, “The whole episode highlighted one of the group’s apparent core beliefs: that such outrages [as the Paris attacks] can be wholly pinned to Western foreign policy – and that if that policy changed, the threat from ISIS and its ilk would recede to nothing . . . some people find that view crass, to say the least.”

That would indeed be crass, but Harris was attacking a straw man. The argument is not that blowback “can be wholly pinned to Western foreign policy,” but that Western foreign policy is clearly a significant factor. Confirmation of this comes, for example, from the statements about the invasion of Iraq made by the London bombers of July 7, 2005 – a point made by former London mayor Ken Livingstone, for which he has been vilified by right-wing media and politicians.

Noam Chomsky provided a typically succinct and rational account of terrorism in a speech titled, “The Evil Scourge of Terrorism,” which he gave in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2010: “If we seriously want to end the plague of terrorism, we know how to do it. First, end our own role as perpetrators. That alone will have a substantial effect. Second, attend to the grievances that are typically in the background, and if they are legitimate, do something about them. Third, if an act of terror occurs, deal with it as a criminal act: Identify and apprehend the suspects and carry out an honest judicial process. That actually works. In contrast, the techniques that are employed enhance the threat of terror.”

In the Guardian, Harris again laid bare

his own interventionist leanings when he repeatedly called upon Murray to condemn Syria’s Assad. “I suggest that the Assad regime has to go, and ask Murray if he agrees. But he doesn’t directly answer the question. We bat the point around for a few minutes, before we arrive at the reason why: As a staunch anti-imperialist, he says it’s not his place to call for the toppling of regimes overseas, a strange position for an avowed internationalist, perhaps, but there we are.”

This is a classic trope underpinning the eternal case for war: A foreign regime is evil and it “has to go,” “something must be done,” “if you don’t condemn that regime’s crimes you are complicit in those crimes,” and on and on.

Again, Chomsky provides a reasoned answer to such propaganda bullets. In a 2013 interview with the Financial Times, he told John McDermott, “Suppose I criticize Iran. What impact does that have? The only impact it has is in fortifying those who want to carry out policies I don’t agree with, like bombing.” He argues that any criticisms about, say, former Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, will invariably get into the mainstream media, whereas those he makes about the US will go unreported. This unfair treatment is the dissident’s lot, according to Chomsky. Intellectuals like to think of themselves as iconoclasts, he says. ‘But you take a look through history and it’s the exact opposite. The respected intellectuals are those who conform and serve power interests.’ ”

It is more important than ever to counter the war-mongering rhetoric emanating from the usual state-corporate interests that demand Orwellian perpetual war. In their increasingly desperate and cynical attacks on Stop the War and Jeremy Corbyn, elite hostility and panic are on clear public display. **CT**

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*David Cromwell and David Edwards are co-editors of Medialens, the UK media Watchdog – [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org)*



# The girl who talked too much

After a long night's work, all **Dell Franklin** needs is a cabload of drunks

A pretty girl in her mid-20s is squished between me and a tall, rangy Hollywood-handsome guy with a cast on his right arm from knuckles to elbow. The girl is drunk and won't stop talking, while the matinee idol beside her is grim and silent. In the back seat, another girl sits between a well-dressed man with a \$75 haircut and a younger fellow in a beanie. Beanie Guy can't keep his hands off the girl, who is too drunk to fend him off. The man behind me taps my shoulder. "Don't take money from anybody else, dude," he orders.

It's two in the morning after a wild Saturday night. I picked this lot, my final passengers of the night, up at Mothers, the hottest downtown gin mill in San Luis Obispo. All I want to do is get rid of them, and go home – I've I've been at it since 3 pm.

As we speed along the freeway heading for Avila Beach, the girl is telling me her troubles. "I've been crying non-stop for a month," she says.

"That's a lotta crying. Over what?"

"My sorority sister was killed in a car accident. She was my best friend. I loved her so. I cried and cried. I still can't stop crying."

"Uh-huh."

"She was living in Denver, but we still talked every day."

"Uh-huh."

Everyone else was quiet; they were too drunk and exhausted. But not this girl. "I've been sick all winter. First, it was a cold. Then I got the flu. And then I got this goddam yeast infection that wouldn't go away . . . and I hate being sick, I'm NEVER SICK, but I've been sick all year..."

She glances at me, and I nod. "I like keeping busy. I've got a good job, I love my job, and I missed so much work . . . and then Debbie died, and then my best friend broke her hip skiing, she's bed-ridden . . ."

"But at least you got your job, right?"

"I've got my job, but . . ."

The guy with the perfect hair taps my shoulder again. "I'm payin'," he reminds me. "Their money's no good."

"If you didn't have your job," I tell the girl. "Things could be worse."

"Well, I know, but . . ."

"And you've got a roof over your head. You're not homeless, are you?"

"Oh God no. I live with Frank, in the back seat, in Avila Beach, in a townhouse he just bought with cash, so I don't really NEED to work, I mean, you know, to survive and all, but I want to work, I need to be doing something. I've always been that way. I was a very hyper kid, and they put me on Ritalin, and I'm still hyper, and I have a lotta stuff going on . . ."

Her cellphone startles me with a cheery jin-

**Beanie Guy can't keep his hands off the girl, who is too drunk to fend him off**



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## ON THE ROAD

**The gal beside me is finally silent. The Adonis beside her is rocking back and forth, gritting his teeth, scowling horribly**

gle. She uh-huhs a little, then goes on a verbal rampage about the night she's just endured, the bar being so crowded and wild, and Rick and Megan fighting, and she was bored and hot, and, "Sweetie, could you please come over for a nightcap?" But the person can't make it, so she feels so bad, she's going to start crying again. She insists, implores, "Please, please, PLEASE come over, I SO need to talk to you, I love you, I miss you so, we're such good friends, we're best friends. Yes, I know you love me, and I love you, too. Why don't you come over. Frank and Rick and Megan and you can all have a nightcap . . ."

I'm tapped on the shoulder. "Don't let anybody else pay, pal."

I promise not to.

"I'll make it worth your while, pal."

We're nearing the Avila Beach off-ramp. Their townhouse is in a gated community adjoining a golf course and country club. They are all so young – mid-20s – and I wonder where they made the money to buy homes that start out at well over half a million bucks.

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Now she's off the phone. "Can I change the music on your radio, please, please, please?" I have soothing jazz on, but I nod, and she goes through a bunch of stations before settling on some jangled hip-hop, turning it up full blast. What the hell, there's only a mile or so to go, who cares about what I want?

"Here, here, here!" the girl exclaims, pointing frantically. "This is where we get off!" The guy in back is tapping again. "Here, here, yeh, here, chief..."

"I know where I'm going." I hit the off-ramp. "I know where Avila Beach is. I've lived and hacked around here for years. It's not like I'm an idiot."

The girl grabs my arm. "I'm sooo sorry." The music is so loud I can hardly think.

"I'm really really sorry. Please don't be upset."

I can't look at her. "I'm not upset."

"You're upset. I'm so sorry. Please don't be mad at me."

"I'm NOT mad at you."

"You don't like me, I know you don't like me."

"For God's Sake, kid, I don't dislike you! Relax. I'm just trying to drive my cab."

"Oh God, you hate me. . . . I know you do."

"I don't HATE you. You're a nice girl. Just a little drunk."

She starts to cry. "I know I talk too much. . . . I know I get on people's nerves. I know I make people mad. I apologize."

She snif es into a handkerchief and squeezes my forearm, her nails like the desperate talons of a captive peregrine. "I'm just too sensitive. You are really a doll. You so are. You remind me of my uncle Jerry, who's dying of cancer. Just a sweetheart. It's just that, oh, I've had such a bad night, such a bad year!"

I pull up to the closed gate. The gatekeeper, a heavy-set Latino with a Lakers cap, is snoozing. We always discuss the Lakers when I come through. Kobe Bryant's the man! I give him a quick honk. He blinks, sits up, pushes a button, waves me on as the gate lifts, and, as I drive through, I say "Go Lakers," and flash him the V-for-victory sign, which he returns, eyes still at half mast.

The gal beside me is finally silent. The Adonis beside her is rocking back and forth, gritting his teeth, scowling horribly. The sex maniac in the back seat is draped all over the girl in the middle; it looks as if he's groping her bosom while planting a passionate wet one on her lips. She's not fighting.

Following directions from the guy sitting behind me, I pull up to a townhouse. There's a BMW ragtop and a BMW SUV in the driveway. He hands me a \$100 bill for a \$21.40 fare.

"Keep the change, cabby," he says, "but on one condition: You take this asshole in the backseat as far away from here as possible."

Everybody piles out. The guy who paid me goes over to a little garden amid slabs of stone and plaster and urinates on a rose bush. As he urinates, the stud with the cast is on the verge of clouting the sex maniac, his cast raised menacingly as he moves towards him. The guy who paid me ceases peeing in mid-stream, hurries over and gets between

the pair as the girls scream and try to pull the attacker back. The girl who was sitting beside me is in hysterics.

“Asshole!” shouts the guy with the cast on his arm. “He jumps in the fucking backseat uninvited and tries to fuck my girl friend! I’m killing you you piss-ant!”

The girl from the backseat, who was being sexually mauled, shouts at me, “Rick’s an ultimate fighter! He’ll kill him and go to jail forever! He’s not supposed to fight. His fists are deadly weapons.”

The sex maniac, meanwhile, believe it or not, is still trying to get his hands on the girl he’s been mauling. I grab him, turn him around, then take him by the scruff of the neck and begin marching him toward the cab, while the other three people try to restrain the beast with the cast.

The back door is open, and I throw the jackass in and slam the door as the ultimate fighter lurches toward the door, prepared to beat the sex maniac to death. “The fuckin’ scum-bag punk, he’s been hittin’ on her all night, he knows she’s with me,” he shouts.

I run around, jump into the cab, lock the buttons and tear away, leaving four disgruntled figures huddled in the driveway in an impromptu love-in designed to mollify the fighting creature. I take a deep breath. I get to the gate, where the keeper is a-slumber, and it opens automatically. Back on the road, I turn my jazz back on and begin to wind down, but now the punk in the back is breathing down my neck, wanting to discuss the situation.

“That big dude, he ain’t givin’ his bitch no play,” he maintains. “He’s a miserable asshole, man. His bitch wanted me. Man, I know when a bitch wants me. She was comin’ on to me in Mothers, man. I was dancin’ with her, and we were dry-humpin’, she was hot to trot.”

“Okay, fine, I don’t wanna hear about it. I’m tired.”

He’s momentarily silent. Then: “Bro’, can yah turn it up to that hip-hop station. That shit you got on depresses me.”

“No.”

Silence. Then, “Hey bro’, my man, like, when we get back in town, let’s cruise Higuera and see if we can score.”

“It’s 2:45. Nobody’s on the streets.”

“So, we’ll cruise, bro’. That rich dude gave you a fat tip, so you can cruise, and I can score some pussy.”

“I’m not gonna cruise kid. Forget it.”

“Shit, man, come on!”

“Where do you live in San Luis?”

“Don’t sweat where I live. I need to score right now. That bitch got me primed. Besides, you owe me.”

“Listen, son, I kept that ultimate fighting beast from pulverizing you, so don’t push it. You’re getting into dangerous territory.”

“Hey dude, mellow out. You’re all up tight, all stressed out, we’ll cruise, man.”

I’m beginning to feel like Raskalnikov before he axe-murdered his landlady in Dostoevsky’s *Crime And Punishment*. In a little more than 10 minutes, this kid has compromised my already limited reservoir of tolerance, humanity and, most vital, my sense of humour. “You gotta shut up, kid,” I say. “Or I’m gonna hafta throw your ass outa this cab.”

“Hey, the dude PAID you to drive me, man!” He’s suddenly snotty. I pull off the freeway onto Marsh St, and soon find Higuera. A squad car slowly cruises past. I take a deep breath and pull over. I turn to the kid. “Do you have a mother?” I ask softly.

“What’s that got to do with anything?”

“You do have a mother, I presume. Does she have any idea how you talk about women? That you’re a sexual predator? Does she have any idea that you hop into backseats with women who belong to other men, and especially men who want to kill you?”

“What the fuck, dude?”

“Get out of this cab,” I say evenly. “Go home to your mother. And learn to appreciate your dry spells.”

“Man, yer an asshole,” he snarls, getting out, walking down Higuera. I drive past him, and he flips me the finger. I laugh and drive away.

**CT**

**“You gotta shut up, kid,” I say. “Or I’m gonna hafta throw your ass outa this cab”**

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*Dell Franklin is a long-time journalist and founder of the Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at [www.dellfranklin.com](http://www.dellfranklin.com)*

# War

# Games

How the New York Times glorifies battle, death and destruction through its front-page photographs



1. **NATURE** – “A convoy from the First Marine Division, hampered yesterday by a sandstorm, took 27 hours to make a trip expected to take 8 to 12 hours.” **NYT, March 6, 2003**

In his new book, *War Is Beautiful*, **David Shields** examines the photographs on the front page of more than 4,500 issues of America’s top newspaper, from 2003 to 2013 – and explains why he no longer reads the New York Times

*All captions to these photographs were created by the New York Times reporting or editorial staff to accompany the images used in print*

For decades, upon opening the New York Times every morning and contemplating the front page, I was entranced by the war photographs. My attraction to the photographs evolved into a mixture of rapture, bafflement, and repulsion. Over time I realized that these photos glorified war through an unrelenting parade of beautiful images whose function is to sanctify the accompanying descriptions



**2. PLAYGROUND** – “Drilling for war: Soldiers in the British First Battalion Parachute Regiment practised driving all-terrain vehicles in Kuwait. The American-led coalition may invade Iraq even before all allied troops arrive.”  
NYT, March 16, 2003



**3. FATHER** – “Crossfire: A marine doctor held an Iraqi girl after her mother was killed by crossfire on the front line near Rifa, American officers said.”  
NYT, March 3, 2003.

of battle, death, destruction, and displacement.

I didn't completely trust my intuition, so over the last year I went back and reviewed New York Times front pages from the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 until the present. When I gathered together hundreds and hundreds of images, I found my original take corroborated: The governing ethos was unmistakably one that

glamorized war and the sacrifices made in the service of war.

The Times, though considered “liberal,” never strays far from a normative position. The centre would never again not hold. The Times and the US government use each other to instantiate their own authority. Throughout its history, the Times has produced exemplary war journalism, but it has done so by retaining a recipro-

**“Who is culpable?  
We all are; our  
collective psyche  
and memory are  
inscribed in these  
photographs”**

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## IN THE PICTURE



**4. GOD** – “In Falluja, an Iraqi thanked Cpl Joseph Sharp after he and other marines delivered food and water to civilians. American officials agreed to call off an offensive in Fallujah if local leaders can persuade guerrillas to turn in their heavy weapons.” NYT, April 24, 2004



**5. PIETA** – “Ali Hadl, a professional body washer, prepared the body of a bombing victim for proper Muslim burial in Najaf while the man’s relatives watched.” NYT, March 4, 2004



**6. PAINTING** – “High death tolls in Afghanistan and Iraq: In Kabul, Afghanistan, above, and in Iraq, civilians were under particularly fierce attack yesterday. Two bombings in Iraq left 23 people dead, and two American soldiers were killed. In Afghanistan, three bombings killed 18 people, including four Canadian soldiers.” NYT, September 9, 2006.



**7. MOVIE** – “Factions battle in the streets of Gaza: A Palestinian boy stood near clashes of Hamas and Fatah in Gaza City yesterday. The fighting has left at least nine Palestinians dead since Sunday, and the Palestinian interior minister resigned.” NYT, May 15, 2007.

**The paper is so integrated with the highest levels of authority that it knows precisely what truth the power wants told**

cal relationship with the administration in power. The paper of record has become the paper of record by being so integrated with the highest levels of authority that it knows precisely what truth the power wants told and then prints this truth as the first draft of history.

After US troops left Iraq, former Times Baghdad bureau chief John F. Burns wrote

in a Times war blog: “America, for all its mistakes – including, as so many believe, the decision to invade in the first place – will at least have the comfort of knowing that it did pretty much all it could do, within the limits of popular acceptance in blood and treasure, to open the way for a better Iraqi future.” President Lyndon Johnson said about Vietnam, “I can’t fight

this war without the support of The New York Times.” A Times war photograph is worth a thousand mirrors.

War photojournalist Ashley Gilbertson, who also worked for the Times, says that photographers found it difficult to work in Iraq because the topography doesn’t show up well in pictures; the country’s natural light is terrible for shooting: “Iraq was just a flat, ugly, Middle Eastern country with a shitload of oil.” Yet the Times’ front-page war photos, while of necessity containing harsh details, consistently yield an Iraq (and Middle East) of epic grandeur.

Reviewing nearly a thousand front-page war pictures, I noticed that many, even most, repeat certain visual tropes, or gestures. This book aims to demonstrate what these patterns are and how these patterns work together.

### War Is Beautiful, chapter by chapter

**Nature.** Military action becomes a habitat, the preserve of masculine desire for war. Men are as glorious as nature when in bellicose tribes occupying wilderness and believing in regeneration through violence.

**Playground.** War is the playground that authorizes the male psyche to exercise its passions. It’s also the dangerous arena into which the Times sends its employees to win awards and promote its brand.

**Father.** Within another culture, the American warrior is presented as protection and relief from the chaos and blood that he himself has unleashed upon the indigenous culture. Children need faux-fathers because their real fathers may already be dead.

**God.** The military commands the globe; the Times surveys and imagines the battlefield from a vantage point high above the field of play; everything is under control for the creation of a new world.

**Pietà.** War death = Christ’s death on the cross. The process of removing the body from the cross and battlefield is sacred. Mourning is always muted and respectful.



**8. BEAUTY** – “Iraqis fled the scene yesterday after car bomb explosions at a street celebration of the opening of a new sewage plant in Baghdad. Two bombers drove their cars into crowds of children waiting to receive candy from GIs.”  
**NYT, October 1, 2004**

Hysterical grief is banned.

**Painting.** War stuns the senses to the point that its portrait needs to be painted over and over. These images apotheosize adrenaline and firepower, preserving American idols.

**Movie.** The positing of action heroes, video games, and special effects in cinematic stills. Countless American war movies are behind the image screens. Technology and art erase the body’s grotesque disfigurement and death.

**Beauty.** Portraits of the other: the occupied and displaced, mostly women and children, beauties seeking salvation. Male sacrifice is consecrated in these faces – the rationale for going to war. Fathers and God are the necessary destroyers.

**Love.** Proximity to death, which marks the separation between military and civilian life, is unmistakably erotic. Like sex, war is a force that gives us meaning; a male soldier’s combat death is as close as he’s ever going to get to birth, to the origin of things.

### THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

1. Ozier Muhammad, NYT/Redux.
2. Chris Ison, Press Association.
3. Damir Sagolj, Reuters.
4. John Moore, Associated Press.
5. Joao Silva, NYT/Redux.
6. Rodrigo Abd, AP.
7. Mohammed Abded, Agence France Press.
8. Wathiq Khuzaie, Getty Images
9. John Moore, Getty



9. Love – “Back from Iraq into welcoming arms: American soldiers were welcomed home from duty in Iraq on Thursday during a ceremony at Fort Carson, Colo.” NYT, November 11, 2011.

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**David Shields** is the bestselling author of 10 previous books, including *Reality Hunger* (named one of the best books of 2010 by more than 30 publications), *The Thing About Life Is That One Day You'll Be Dead*. This essay is an edited version of Shields's introduction to *War Is Beautiful*.

**Death.** The machine rolls on; the war dead incarnate the immortal epic, told as if they agreed to lie supine to support the light and civilization that surely surround them.

Art is an ordering of nature and artifact. The Times uses its front-page war photographs to convey that a chaotic world is ultimately under control, encased within amber. In so doing, the paper of record promotes its institutional power as protector/curator of death-dealing democracy. Who is culpable? We all are; our collective psyche and memory are inscribed in these photographs. Behind these sublime images are hundreds of thousands of unobserved, anonymous war deaths; this book is witness to a graveyard of horrendous beauty. **CT**

**THE BOOK**

**WAR IS BEAUTIFUL**



**WAR IS BEAUTIFUL**

The New York Times Pictorial Guide to the Glamour of Armed Conflict \*

By David Shields  
Published by powerHouse Books

\$28 (Amazon.com)

\* (in which the author explains why he no longer reads The New York Times)



# The curious logic of the police state

People are waking up to the darkness in American policing, and the police don't like it one bit, writes **Matthew Harwood**

If you've been listening to various police agencies and their supporters, then you know what the future holds: Anarchy is coming – and it's all the fault of activists.

Last May, a Wall Street Journal op-ed warned of a “new nationwide crime wave” thanks to “intense agitation against American police departments” over the previous year. New Jersey Governor Chris Christie went further. Talking recently with the host of CBS's Face the Nation, the Republican presidential hopeful asserted that the Black Lives Matter movement wasn't about reform but something far more sinister. “They've been chanting in the streets for the murder of police officers,” he insisted. Even the nation's top cop, FBI director James Comey, weighed in at the University of Chicago Law School, speaking of “a chill wind that has blown through American law enforcement over the last year.”

According to these figures and others like them, lawlessness has been sweeping the nation as the so-called Ferguson effect spreads. Criminals have been emboldened as police officers are forced to think twice about doing their jobs for fear of the infamy of starring in the next viral video. The police have supposedly become the targets of assassins intoxicated by “anti-cop rhetoric,” just as departments are being stripped of the kind of high-powered equipment they need to protect officers and communities. Even

their funding streams have, it's claimed, come under attack as anti-cop bias has infected Washington, DC. Senator Ted Cruz caught the spirit of that critique by convening a Senate subcommittee hearing to which he gave the title, The War on Police: How the Federal Government Undermines State and Local Law Enforcement. According to him, the federal government, including the president and attorney general, has been vilifying the police, who are now being treated as if they, not the criminals, were the enemy.

Beyond the storm of commentary and criticism, however, quite a different reality presents itself. In the simplest terms, there is no war on the police. Violent attacks against police officers remain at historic lows, even though approximately 1,000 people were killed in the US by the police last year nationwide. In just the past few weeks, videos have been released of problematic fatal police shootings in San Francisco and Chicago.

What is taking place and what the police and their supporters are largely reacting to is a modest push for sensible law enforcement reforms from groups as diverse as Campaign Zero, Koch Industries, the Cato Institute, The Leadership Conference, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), my employer. Unfortunately, as the rhetoric ratchets up, many police agencies and organizations are

**Violent attacks against police officers remain at historic lows, even though approximately 1,000 people were killed in the US by the police last year nationwide**

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## WELCOME TO COP LAND

**The message being sent to a prosecutor willing to indict cops was hardly subtle: You're a traitor**

increasingly resistant to any reforms, forgetting whom they serve and ignoring constitutional limits on what they can do.

Indeed, a closer look at law enforcement arguments against commonsense reforms such as independently investigating police violence, demilitarizing police forces, and ending “for-profit policing” reveals a striking disregard for concerns of just about any sort when it comes to brutality and abuse. What this “debate” has revealed, in fact, is a mainstream policing mindset ready to manufacture fear without evidence and promote the belief that American civil rights and liberties are actually an impediment to public safety. In the end, such law enforcement arguments subvert the very idea that the police are there to serve the community and should be under civilian control.

And that, when you come right down to it, is the logic of the police state.

### **Due process plus**

It's no mystery why so few police officers are investigated and prosecuted for using excessive force and violating someone's rights. “Local prosecutors rely on local police departments to gather the evidence and testimony they need to successfully prosecute criminals,” according to the organization Campaign Zero. “This makes it hard for them to investigate and prosecute the same police officers in cases of police violence.”

Since 2005, according to an analysis by the Washington Post and Bowling Green State University, only 54 officers have been prosecuted nationwide, despite the thousands of fatal shootings by police. As Philip M. Stinson, a criminologist at Bowling Green, puts it, “To charge an officer in a fatal shooting, it takes something so egregious, so over the top that it cannot be explained in any rational way. It also has to be a case that prosecutors are willing to hang their reputation on.”

For many in law enforcement, however, none of this should concern any of us. When New York Governor Andrew Cuomo

signed an executive order appointing a special prosecutor to investigate police killings, for instance, Patrick Lynch, president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, insisted: “Given the many levels of oversight that already exist, both internally in the NYPD [New York Police Department] and externally in many forms, the appointment of a special prosecutor is unnecessary.” Even before Cuomo's decision, the chairman of New York's District Attorneys Association called plans to appoint a special prosecutor for police killings “deeply insulting.”

Such pushback against the very idea of independently investigating police actions has, post-Ferguson, become everyday fare, and some law enforcement leaders have staked out a position significantly beyond that. The police, they clearly believe, should get special treatment.

“By virtue of our dangerous vocation, we should expect to receive the benefit of the doubt in controversial incidents,” wrote Ed Mullins, the president of New York City's Sergeants Benevolent Association, in the organization's magazine, *Frontline*. As if to drive home the point, its cover depicts Baltimore state attorney Marilyn Mosby under the ominous headline “The Wolf That Lurks.” In May, Mosby had announced indictments of six officers in the case of Freddie Gray, who died in Baltimore police custody the previous month. The message being sent to a prosecutor willing to indict cops was hardly subtle: You're a traitor.

Mullins put forward a legal standard for officers accused of wrongdoing that he would never support for the average citizen – and in a situation in which cops already get what former federal prosecutor Laurie Levenson calls “a super presumption of innocence.” In addition, police unions in many states have aggressively pushed for their own bills of rights, which make it nearly impossible for police officers to be fired, much less charged with crimes when they violate an individual's civil rights and



“Unlike a member of the public, the officer can be interrogated only ‘for reasonable periods,’ which ‘shall be timed to allow for such personal necessities and rest periods as are reasonably necessary”

**Battlefield America: An armoured police vehicle heads into action during Baltimore protests against the police killing of Freddie Gray.**  
Photo: Arash Azzizada

liberties.

In 14 states, versions of a Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights (LEOBR) have already been passed, while in 11 others they are under consideration. These provide an “extra layer of due process” in cases of alleged police misconduct, according to Samuel Walker, an expert on police accountability. In many of the states without a LEOBR, the Marshall Project, a non-profit, non-partisan news organization covering America’s criminal justice system, has discovered, police unions have directly negotiated the same rights and privileges with state governments.

LEOBRs are, in fact, amazingly unAmerican documents in the protections they afford officers accused, during internal investigations, of misconduct – rights that those officers are never required to extend to their suspects. Though the specific language of these laws varies from state to state, notes Mike Riggs in Reason magazine, they are remarkably similar in their special considerations for the police.

“Unlike a member of the public, the of-

ficier gets a “cooling off” period before he has to respond to any questions. Unlike a member of the public, the officer under investigation is privy to the names of his complainants and their testimony against him before he is ever interrogated. Unlike a member of the public, the officer under investigation is to be interrogated ‘at a reasonable hour,’ with a union member present. Unlike a member of the public, the officer can only be questioned by one person during his interrogation. Unlike a member of the public, the officer can be interrogated only ‘for reasonable periods,’ which ‘shall be timed to allow for such personal necessities and rest periods as are reasonably necessary.’ Unlike a member of the public, the officer under investigation cannot be ‘threatened with disciplinary action’ at any point during his interrogation. If he is threatened with punishment, whatever he says following the threat cannot be used against him.”

The Marshall Project refers to these laws as the “Blue Shield” and “the original Bill of Rights with an upgrade.” Police associations, naturally, don’t agree. “All this does is

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## WELCOME TO COP LAND

**Even the idea that the police shouldn't sport the look of an occupying army in local communities has been met with fierce resistance**

provide a very basic level of constitutional protections for our officers, so that they can make statements that will stand up later in court," says Vince Canales, the president of Maryland's Fraternal Order of Police.

Put another way, there are two kinds of due process in America – one for cops and another for the rest of us. This is the reason why the Black Lives Matter movement and other civil rights and civil liberties organizations regularly call on states to create a special prosecutor's office to launch independent investigations when police seriously injure or kill someone.

### **The demilitarized blues**

Since Americans first took in those images from Ferguson of police units outfitted like soldiers, riding in military vehicles, and pointing assault rifles at protesters, the militarization of the police and the way the Pentagon has been supplying them with equipment directly off this country's distant battlefields have been top concerns for police reformers. Last May, the Obama administration suggested modest changes to the Pentagon's 1033 Program, which, since 1990, has been redistributing weaponry and equipment to police departments nationwide – urban, suburban, and rural – in the name of fighting the war on drugs and protecting Americans from terrorism.

Even the idea that the police shouldn't sport the look of an occupying army in local communities has, however, been met with fierce resistance. Read, for example, the online petition started by the National Sheriffs' Association and you could be excused for thinking that the Obama administration was aggressively moving to stop the flow of military-grade equipment to local and state police agencies. (It isn't.) The message that tops the petition is as simple as it is misleading: "Don't strip law enforcement of the gear they need to keep us safe."

The Obama administration has done no such thing. In May, the president an-

nounced that he was prohibiting certain military-grade equipment from being transferred to state and local law enforcement. "Some equipment made for the battlefield is not appropriate for local police departments," he said. The list included tracked armored vehicles (essentially tanks), bayonets, grenade launchers, camouflage uniforms, and guns and ammo of .50 caliber or higher. In reality, what use could a local police department have for bayonets, grenade launchers, or the kinds of bullets that resemble small missiles, pierce armor, and can blow people's limbs off?

But the sheriffs' association has no problem complaining that "the White House announced the government would no longer provide equipment like helicopters and MRAPs [mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles] to local law enforcement." And it's not even true. Police departments can still obtain both helicopters and MRAPs if they establish community policing practices, institute training protocols, and get community approval before the equipment transfer occurs.

"Helicopters rescue runaways and natural disaster victims," the sheriff's association adds gravely, "and MRAPs are used to respond to shooters who barricade themselves in neighborhoods and are one of the few vehicles able to navigate hurricane, snowstorm, and tornado-strewn areas to save survivors."

As with our wars abroad, think mission creep at home. A program started to wage the war on drugs and strengthened after 9/11, is now being justified on the grounds that certain equipment is useful during disasters or emergencies. In reality, the police have clearly become hooked on a militarized look. Many departments are ever more attached to their weapons of war and evidently don't mind the appearance of being an occupying force in their communities, which leaves groups like the sheriffs' association fighting fiercely for a militarized future.

## Legal plunder

In July 2015, the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Arizona sued law enforcement in Pinal County, Arizona, on behalf of Rhonda Cox. Two years before, her son had stolen some truck accessories and, without her knowledge, fitted them on her truck. When the county sheriff's department arrested him, it also seized the truck.

Arriving on the scene of her son's arrest, Cox asked a deputy about getting her truck back. No way, he told her. After she protested, explaining that she had nothing to do with her son's alleged crimes, he responded, "Too bad." Under Arizona law, the truck could indeed be taken into custody and kept or sold off by the sheriff's department even though she was never charged with a crime. The *truck* was guilty even if she wasn't.

Welcome to America's civil asset forfeiture laws, another product of law enforcement's failed war on drugs, updated for the 21st century. Originally designed to deprive suspected real-life Scarfaces of the spoils of their illicit trade – houses, cars, boats – it now regularly deprives people unconnected with the war on drugs of their property without due process of law and in violation of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments. Not surprisingly, corruption follows.

Federal and state law enforcement can now often keep property seized or sell it and retain a portion of the revenue generated. Some of this, in turn, can be repurposed and distributed as bonuses in police and other law enforcement departments. The only way the dispossessed stand a chance of getting such "forfeited" property back is if they are willing to take on the government in a process where the deck is stacked against them.

In such cases, for instance, property owners have no right to an attorney to defend them, which means that they must either pony up additional cash for a lawyer or contest the seizure themselves in court. "It is an upside-down world where," says the lib-

ertarian Institute for Justice, "the government holds all the cards and has the financial incentive to play them to the hilt."

In this century, civil asset forfeiture has mutated into what's now called "for-profit policing," in which police departments and state and federal law enforcement agencies indiscriminately seize the property of citizens who aren't drug kingpins. Sometimes, for instance, distinctly ordinary citizens suspected of driving drunk or soliciting prostitutes get their cars confiscated. Sometimes they simply get cash taken from them on suspicion of low-level drug dealing.

Like most criminal justice issues, race matters in civil asset forfeiture. This summer, the ACLU of Pennsylvania issued a report, *Guilty Property*, documenting how the Philadelphia Police Department and district attorney's office abused state civil asset forfeiture by taking at least \$1-million from innocent people within the city limits. Approximately 70 per cent of the time, those people were black, even though the city's population is almost evenly divided between whites and African-Americans.

Currently, only one state, New Mexico, has done away with civil asset forfeiture entirely, while also severely restricting state and local law enforcement from profiting off similar national laws when they work with the feds. (The police in Albuquerque are, however, actively defying the new law, demonstrating yet again the way in which police departments believe the rules don't apply to them.) That no other state has done so is hardly surprising. Police departments have become so reliant on civil asset forfeiture to pad their budgets and acquire "little goodies" that reforming, much less repealing, such laws is a tough sell.

As with militarization, when police defend such policies, you sense their urgent desire to maintain what many of them now clearly think of as police rights. In August last year, for instance, Pinal County sheriff Paul Babeu sent a fundraising email to his supporters using the imagined peril of the

**Civil asset forfeiture has mutated into what's now called "for-profit policing" in which police departments and state and federal law enforcement agencies indiscriminately seize the property of citizens who aren't drug kingpins**

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## WELCOME TO COP LAND

**For too long, the police have avoided accountability for brutal misconduct, while in this century arming themselves for war on America's streets and misusing laws to profit off the public trust, largely in secret**

ACLU lawsuit as clickbait. In justifying civil forfeiture, he failed to mention that a huge portion of the money goes to enrich his own department, but praised the program in this fashion: “[O]ver the past seven years, the Pinal County Sheriff’s Office has donated \$1.2-million of seized criminal money to support youth programs like the Boys & Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts, YMCA, high school graduation night lock-in events and youth sports, as well as veterans groups, local food banks, victims assistance programs, and Home of Home in Casa Grande.”

Under this logic, police officers can steal from people who haven’t even been charged with a crime as long as they share the wealth with community organizations – though, in fact, neither in Pinal County or elsewhere is that where most of the confiscated loot appears to go. Think of this as the development of a culture of thievery masquerading as Robin Hood in blue.

### **Contempt for civilian control**

Post-Ferguson developments in policing are essentially a struggle over whether the police deserve special treatment and exceptions from the rules the rest of us must follow. For too long, they have avoided accountability for brutal misconduct, while in this century arming themselves for war on America’s streets and misusing laws to profit off the public trust, largely in secret. The events of the past two years have offered graphic evidence that police culture is dysfunctional and in need of a democratic reformation.

There are, of course, still examples of law enforcement leaders who see the police as part of American society, not apart from it. But even then, the reformers face stiff resistance from the law enforcement communities they lead. In Minneapolis, for instance, police chief Janeé Harteau attempted to have state investigators look into incidents when her officers seriously hurt or killed someone in the line of duty. Police union opposition killed her plan. In Philadelphia,

police commissioner Charles Ramsey ordered his department to publicly release the names of officers involved in shootings within 72 hours of any incident. The city’s police union promptly challenged his policy, while the Pennsylvania House of Representatives passed a bill in November to stop the release of the names of officers who fire their weapon or use force when on the job unless criminal charges are filed. Not surprisingly, three powerful police unions in the state supported the legislation.

In the present atmosphere, many in the law enforcement community see the Harteaus and Ramseys of their profession as figures who don’t speak for them, and groups or individuals wanting even the most modest of police reforms as so many police haters. As former New York Police Department commissioner Howard Safir told Fox News last May, “Similar to athletes on the playing field, sometimes it’s difficult to tune out the boos from the no-talents sipping their drinks, sitting comfortably in their seats. It’s demoralizing to read about the misguided anti-cop gibberish spewing from those who take their freedoms for granted.”

The disdain in such imagery, increasingly common in the world of policing, is striking. It smacks of a police-state, bunker mentality that sees democratic values and just about any limits on the power of law enforcement as threats. In other words, the Safirs want the public – particularly in communities of color and poor neighborhoods – to shut up and do as it’s told when a police officer says so. If the cops give the orders, compliance – so this line of thinking goes – isn’t optional, no matter how egregious the misconduct or how sensible the reforms. Obey or else.

The post-Ferguson public clamor demanding better policing continues to get louder, and yet too many police departments have this to say in response: Welcome to Cop Land. We make the rules around here.

**CT**

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editor at the ACLU.  
His work has  
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*the American*  
*Conservative*,  
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*War is Boring*, and  
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appeared at [www.  
tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)

# How Britain is helping to strangle Yemen

My country is selling arms used in war on civilians, writes **Daniel Margrain**

The proxy war being fought in Syria, is often overshadowed by the nine-month-old regional conflict in Yemen that ostensibly pits Sunni Saudi Arabia against Shia Iran. British-made “smart” bombs dropped from British-built aircraft, which continue to be sold in vast numbers to the Saudis, have contributed to thousands of civilian deaths in Yemen.

UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn’s peace narrative, which is predicated on his public denunciations of the government’s shady dealings with the Saudi Arabian regime, has helped expose British involvement in Yemen, although the UK government insists that it is not taking an active part in the military campaign in the country. However, it has issued more than 100 licences for arms exports to Saudi Arabia since the state began bombing Yemen in March 2015.

Meanwhile, a Freedom of Information request revealed that a so-called “memorandum of understanding” (MOU) between Home Secretary Theresa May and her Saudi counterpart, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, was signed during the former’s visit to the kingdom last year. The purpose of the MOU is to ensure that, among other secret deals, the precise details of the arms sales between the two countries are kept under wraps.

To what extent does Britain’s arming of Saudi Arabia play in the destruction of Yemen? In September, Saudi Arabia bombed a ceramics factory in Sana’a close to the Yemeni capital, which Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch confirmed was a civilian target. Fragments of a British-made missile built by Marconi in the 1990s had been recovered from the scene.

With the British providing technical and other support staff to the Saudi-led coalition, and UK export licenses to Saudi Arabia said to be worth more than £1.7-billion up to the first six months of 2015, the UK government’s role in the conflict appears to be to augment US support.

The United States, alongside the UK, has bolstered the Saudi-led coalition’s airstrikes in Yemen through arms sales and direct military support. Recently, for example, the State Department approved a billion-dollar deal to restock Saudi Arabia’s air force arsenal. The sale included thousands of air-to-ground munitions and “general purpose” bombs of the kind that, in October, the Saudi’s used to target a Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) hospital in North Yemen last October.

On December 15, 19 civilians were killed by a coalition raid in Sana’a. According to analysis by eminent international law experts commissioned by Amnesty International UK and Saferworld, by continuing to trade

**Recently, the State Department approved a billion-dollar deal to restock Saudi Arabia’s air force arsenal. The sale included thousands of air-to-ground munitions and “general purpose” bombs of the kind that, in October, the Saudi’s used to target an MSF hospital**

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## ARMS SALES

**“It is illogical for Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond to say there is no evidence of weapons supplied by the UK being misused, so we’ll keep selling them to the point where we learn they are being used”**

with Saudi Arabia in arms in the context of its military intervention and bombing campaign in Yemen, the British government, and others, are breaking national, European Union and international law.

Lawyers professor Philippe Sands, QC, professor Andrew Clapham and Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh of Matrix Chambers, conclude in their comprehensive legal opinion that, on the basis of the information available, the UK government is acting in breach of its obligations arising under the Arms Trade Treaty, the EU Common Position on Arms Exports and the UK’s Consolidated Criteria on arms exports by continuing to authorize transfers of weapons and related items to Saudi Arabia.

They say that, “Any authorization by the UK of the transfer of weapons and related items to Saudi Arabia . . . in circumstances where such weapons are capable of being used in the conflict in Yemen, including to support its blockade of Yemeni territory, and in circumstances where their end-use is not restricted, would constitute a breach by the UK of its obligations under domestic, European and international law. . . . The UK should halt with immediate effect all authorizations and transfers of relevant weapons pending an inquiry.”

According to Kate Allen, director of Amnesty International UK, “This legal opinion confirms our long-held view that the continued sale of arms from the UK to Saudi Arabia is illegal, immoral and indefensible. Thousands of civilians have been killed in Saudi Arabia-led airstrikes, and there’s a real risk that misery was ‘made in Britain.’”

With a seven-day ceasefire in Yemen broken on December 16, Saudi-led airstrikes continued throughout the month, as have British and American arms exports to Saudi Arabia that give rise to them. In a standard response to accusations of British complicity, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office blandly stated, “The UK is satisfied that we are not in breach of our international obli-



**Illogical: British Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond.**

gations. We operate one of the most vigorous and transparent arms export control regimes in the world. . . .

“We regularly raise with the Saudi Arabian-led coalition and the Houthis the need to comply with international humanitarian law . . . we monitor the situation carefully and have offered the Saudi authorities advice and training in this area.”

### **Rewriting the rules**

Oliver Sprague, Amnesty International’s arms trade director, says, “There is a blatant rewriting of the rules inside the (Foreign Office). We are not supposed to supply weapons if there is a risk they could be used to violate humanitarian laws and the international arms trade treaty – which we championed. It is illogical for (UK Foreign Secretary) Philip Hammond to say there is no evidence of weapons supplied by the UK being misused, so we’ll keep selling them to the point where we learn they are being used.”

Journalist Iona Craig has investigated 20 Saudi-led airstrike sites in Yemen in which a total of around 150 civilians have been



killed. In an interview on the December 16 edition of Channel 4 News, Craig asserted that during these strikes, which she said are a regular occurrence, the Saudi's targeted public buses and a farmers market. Remnants from a bomb that Craig pulled from a civilian home that killed an 18-month old baby, a four-year-old and their uncle, were American-made. Although Craig has admitted that she has not personally uncovered evidence of British-made weapons, Amnesty International is nevertheless unequivocal in its damning assessment of the illegality of Britain's role.

The fact that, as Craig stated, there are twice as many British-made aircraft in the Royal Saudi Air Force than there are in the British Royal Air Force, and that the British train the Saudi air force as well as supplying it with its weapons is, by itself, tantamount to Britain being complicit in the deaths of innocent Yemeni civilians.

Craig emphasized that she has seen evidence that suggests that civilian casualties in Yemen were the result of deliberate targeting rather than "collateral damage." Among the numerous cases the journalist has examined, there were no Houthi positions or military targets in the vicinity – a contention she claims is supported by the pro-coalition side. The result of this policy for the civilian population within the poorest country in the region, has been catastrophic, with an estimated two-million people having been displaced from a nation that's on the brink of completely falling apart.

At least 5,600 civilians have been killed in the war-torn country since March, 2015. A United Nations study in September found that 60 per cent of these have died from Saudi-led aerial bombardments in the Houthi-controlled northern Yemen.

Journalist Sharif Abdel Kouddous who was based in this region commented, "Everything has been hit, from homes to schools, restaurants, bridges, roads, a lot of civilian infrastructure. And with that, of course,

comes a lot of the suffering."

What is unfolding, alongside the death and destruction in Yemen, is a massive humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by the complicity of the U.S and the UK, in which 21-million people – almost double the number of people who need aid in Syria – are in need of humanitarian assistance. Consequently, levels of malnutrition have skyrocketed in the country, with more than 60 per cent of Yemenis, according to the UN, close to starvation.

Sharif Abdel Kouddos describes the humanitarian situation unfolding in Yemen as a consequence of the imposition of a blockade on Yemen by Saudi Arabia and the coalition on a country that, ". . . comes under the rubric of a Security Council resolution – an arms embargo on the Houthi leadership. . . . In September, one per cent of Yemen's fuel needs entered the country. Fuel affects everything – access for food delivery, electricity. So, Yemenis are slowly being strangled to death."

The wider implications for British and U.S tacit support for Saudi Arabia in Yemen and the region in general is one of huge instability. Apart from Yemen, where millions are being displaced and suffering from the onset of famine, is the broader question relating to how this situation is likely to bleed into the refugee crisis in Europe.

The conflict in Yemen involves a variety of regional players with opposing economic and geo-strategic interests – many of whom are using smaller factions to fight battles on their behalf. These include mercenary groups from places as far away as Colombia and Panama, as well as the involvement of Moroccan and Sudanese troops, all of whom are operating within one country as a part of a regional conflict that has all the makings of a much bigger war. **CT**

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**What is unfolding, alongside the death and destruction in Yemen, is a massive humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by the complicity of the U.S and the UK, in which 21-million people – almost double the number of people who need aid in Syria – are in need of humanitarian assistance**

# The 2015 Awards for Stupidity

**Conn Hallinan** delivers his annual list of foul-ups, doublespeak, bad planning and sheer incompetence

**The Pentagon response to a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan on missing funds was to declare that all such information was now classified, because it might provide "sensitive information for those that threaten our forces and Afghan forces"**

**E**ach year I give awards to individuals, companies, and governments that make following the news a daily adventure. Here are the awards for 2015

## **The First Amendment Award**

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter for issuing a new Law Of War manual that defines reporters as "unprivileged belligerents" who will lose their "privileged" status by "the relaying of information" that "could constitute taking a direct part in hostilities." Translation? If you report, you are in the same class as members of al-Qaeda. A Pentagon spokesperson said that the military "supports and respects the vital work that journalists perform." Just so long as they keep what they see, hear, and discover to themselves? Professor of constitutional law Heidi Kitrosser called the language "alarming."

**Runner up** is the US Military College at West Point for hiring assistant professor of law William C. Bradford, who argues that the military should target "legal scholars" who are critical of the "war on terrorism." Such critics are "treasonous," he says. Bradford proposes going after "law school facilities, scholars' home offices and media outlets where they give interviews." Bradford also favours attacking "Islamic holy sites," even if that means "great destruction, innumerable enemy casualties, and civilian collateral damage."

## **The Little Bo Peep Award for losing track of things**

This goes to the US Defense Department for being unable to account for \$35-billion in construction aid to Afghanistan, which is about \$14-billion more than the country's GDP. The US has spent \$107.5-billion on reconstruction in Afghanistan, more than the Marshall Plan. Most of it went to private contractors. The Pentagon response to the report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan on the missing funds was to declare that all such information classified, because it might provide "sensitive information for those that threaten our forces and Afghan forces." It has since partially backed off that declaration.

While it is only pocket change in comparison to Afghanistan, the Pentagon also could not account for more than \$500-million in military aid to Yemen. The US is currently aiding Saudi Arabia and a number of other Gulf monarchies that are bombing Houthi rebels battling the Yemeni government. Much of that aid was supposed to go to fight al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), against which the US is also waging a drone war. The most effective foes of AQAP are the Shiite Houthis. So we are supporting the Saudis and their allies against the Houthis, while fighting al-Qaeda in Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

If the reader is confused, I suggest taking

a strong painkiller and lying down.

### **The George Orwell Award for Language**

This goes to the intelligence-gathering organizations of the “Five Eyes” surveillance alliance – the US, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand – which changed the words “mass surveillance” to “bulk collection.” The linguistic gymnastics allows the Five to claim that they are not violating Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In the 2000 decision of *Amann v. Switzerland*, the Court found that it was illegal to store information on an individual’s private life.

As investigative journalist Glen Greenwald points out, the name switch is similar to replacing the word “torture” with “enhanced interrogation techniques.” The first is illegal, the second vague enough for interrogators to claim they are not violating the International Convention Against Torture.

A runner up is the US Defense Department, which changed the scary title of “Air Sea Battle,” describing the US’s current military doctrine vis-à-vis China, to “Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons.” The Air Sea Battle doctrine calls for bottling up China’s navy, launching missile attacks to destroy command centres, and landing troops on the Chinese mainland. It includes scenarios for the use of nuclear weapons. “Global Commons,” on the other hand, sounds like a picnic on the lawn.

### **The Lassie Come Home Award**

This goes to the US Marine Corps for creating a 160-pound robot dog that will “enhance the Marine Corps war-fighting capabilities,” according to Captain James Pineiro. Pineiro heads up the Corp’s Warfighting Laboratory at Quantico, Virginia. “We see it as a great potential for the future dismounted infantry.” The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is also designing an autonomous fighting robot. Can the Terminator be far off?

### **The Golden Lemon Award**

This honour goes to Lockheed Martin, the biggest arms manufacturer in the world, which has managed to produce two stunningly expensive weapons systems that don’t work. The F-35 Lightning II is the single most expensive weapons system in US history: \$1.5 trillion. It is supposed to replace all other fighter-bomber aircraft in the American arsenal, including the F-15, F-16 and F-18, and will begin deployment in 2016.

In dogfights with the three-decade-old F-16, the F-35 routinely lost. Because it is heavy and underpowered, it is extremely difficult to turn the plane during air-to-air combat. It has a fancy 25-MM Gatling gun that gets off 3,000 rounds a minute – but the plane can only carry 180 rounds. As one Air Force official put it, “Hope you don’t miss.” Oh, and the software for the gun won’t be out until 2019. That’s not the only glitch. The F-35 has stealth technology, but its Identification Friend or Foe system is so bad that pilots are required to get a visual confirmation of their target. Not a good idea when the other guys have long-range air-to-air missiles. The \$600,000 high-tech helmet the pilot uses to see everything around him often doesn’t work very well, and there isn’t enough room in the cockpit to turn your head. If the helmet goes out, there is no backup landing systems, so maybe you had better eject? Bad idea. The fatality rate for small pilots (those under 139 pounds) at low speeds is 98 per cent, not good odds. Larger pilots do better but the changes of a broken neck are still distressingly high.

But it is not just Lockheed Martin’s airplanes that don’t work, neither do its ships.

The company’s new littoral combat ship (LCS), the *Milwaukee*, broke down during its recent East Coast tour and had to be towed to Virginia Beach. The LCSs are designed to fight in shallow waters, but a recent Pentagon analysis says the ships would “not be survivable in a hostile combat situation.” The LCSs have been plagued with engine problems and spend more than 50 per cent

**The F-35 has stealth technology, but its Identification Friend or Foe system is so bad that pilots are required to get a visual confirmation of their target**

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## WHOOPS!

**The US will base the B61-12 in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Turkey, a violation of Articles I and II of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Those two articles ban transferring nukes from a nuclear weapon state to a non-nuclear weapon state**

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of their time in port being repaired. The program costs \$37 billion.

And Lockheed Martin, along with Northrop Grumman and Boeing, just got a \$58.2 billion contract to build the next generation Long-Range Strike Bomber. Sigh.

### **The Great Moments In Democracy Award**

This goes to Jyrki Katainen, Finnish vice-president of the European Commission, the executive arm of the 28-nation European Union. When Greece's anti-austerity Syriza Party was elected, he commented, "We don't change policies depending on elections." So, why is it that people have elections?

A close runner up in this category is German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble, who denounced Athens' government for not cracking down on Greeks who can't pay their taxes. The biggest tax dodger in Greece? That would be the huge German construction company, Hochtief, which has not paid the value-added tax for 20 years, nor made its required contributions to social security. Estimates are that the company owes Greece one billion Euros.

### **The Ty-D-Bol Cleanup Award**

Sinner is the US State Department for finally agreeing to clean up plutonium contamination, the residue from three hydrogen bombs that fell near the Andalusia town of Palomares in Southern Spain in 1966. The bombs were released when a B-52 collided with an air tanker. While the bombs did not explode – Palomares and a significant section of southern Spain would not exist if they had – they broke open, spreading seven pounds of highly toxic plutonium 239 over the area. Plutonium has a half-life of 24,000 years.

While there was an initial cleanup, Francisco Franco's fascist government covered up the incident and played down the dangers. But recent studies indicate that there is still contamination, and some of the radioactive materials are degrading into americium, a producer of dangerous gamma radiation.

When Spain re-raised the issue in 2011, the

US stonewalled Madrid. So why is Washington coming to an agreement now? Quid pro quo: the US wants to base some of its navy at Rota in Southern Spain, and the Marines are setting up a permanent base at Moron de la Frontera.

As for nukes, the US is deploying its new B61-12 guided nuclear bomb in Europe. At \$11-billion it is the most expensive nuke in the US arsenal. The US will base the B61-12 in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Turkey, a violation of Articles I and II of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Those two articles ban transferring nukes from a nuclear weapon state to a non-nuclear weapon state.

### **Buyer Beware Award**

This goes to the purchasing arm of the US Defense Department that sent dozens of MD-530 attack helicopters to Afghanistan to build up the Afghan Air Force. Except the McDonnell Douglass-made choppers can't operate above 8,000 feet, which means they can't clear many of the mountains that ring Kabul. The Afghan capital is at 6,000 feet. The helicopter also doesn't have the range to reach Taliban-controlled areas and, according to the pilots, its guns jam all the time. The Pentagon also paid more than \$400-million to give Afghanistan 16 transport planes that were in such bad condition they couldn't fly. The planes ended up being sold as scrap for \$32,000.

### **The Pogo Possum "We Have Met The Enemy and He Is Us" Award**

This goes to the Defense Intelligence Agency for warning Congress that "Chinese and Russian military leaders . . . were developing capabilities to deny [the] US use of space in the event of a conflict." Indeed, US military satellites were jammed 261 times in 2015 – by the United States. Asked how many times China and Russia had jammed US signals, Gen. John Hyten, head of the Air Force Space Command replied, "I don't really know. My guess is zero." **CT**

# Ramping up for a new Cold War

**Eric Margolis** shows how the US media is misinforming the public about military threats from Russia

**A** striking example of how dangerously Americans are misinformed and misled by the war party was featured in a major article in the New York Times on December 24, 2015.

In “Russia Rearms for a New Era,” the authors assert Russian military spending is growing and has risen \$11 billion from 2014 to 2015. Lurid maps and diagrams of weapons make it seem that Stalin’s 210-division Red Army is again on the march – and headed into Europe.

Kimberley Marten, a professor at Columbia’s Harriman Institute, was actually quoted claiming that President Vladimir Putin is trying to “provoke the US and NATO into military action” to bolster his popularity. What unbelievable rubbish. The professor believes that Putin, whose popularity ratings rise over 82 per cent in Russia, needs to court nuclear war to gain a few more points? Shame on the NY Times.

Let’s look at the true figures. The US so-called “defence budget” (it should be called “offence budget”) is in the range of \$600 billion, 37 per cent of total world military spending by a nation that has only 5 per cent of the world’s population.

Some studies put the true figure at \$700 billion.

Not included in this figure are “black”

projects, a lot of handouts to foreign military forces, and undeclared slush funds for waging small wars in Afghanistan, the Mideast, Africa and Asia. The US has over 700 military bases around the globe, with new ones opening all the time.

The US spends more on its armed forces than the next nine military powers – combined. America’s wealthy allies in Europe and Japan add important power to America’s global military domination.

Russia defense spending is roughly \$70 billion, and this in spite of plunging oil prices and US-led sanctions. France and Britain each spend almost as much; Saudi Arabia spends more. A French admiral ruefully told me the US Navy’s budget alone exceeded that of France’s total armed forces.

Russia is a vast nation with very difficult geography that limits its different military regions from supporting one another – a problem from which Russia has suffered since its 1904 war with Japan. Moscow needs large, often redundant armed forces to cover its immensity. This includes the warming Arctic, where Russia, like other coastal nations, is asserting its sovereignty. And Russia must also keep a watchful eye on neighboring China.

The Kremlin’s view is that America is trying to tear down what’s left of the post-Soviet Russian Federation by subver-

**A French admiral ruefully told me the US Navy’s budget alone exceeded that of France’s total armed forces**

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## FIT TO PRINT?

**The only real Russian threat we face is the danger of blundering into a potential nuclear confrontation with Russia in Ukraine, the Black Sea, Syria or Iraq**

sion (such as regime changes in Georgia, Ukraine) and by stirring up Muslim independence movements in the Caucasus and Central Asia. That's why Russian military forces are fighting in Syria.

After the total collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's economy and its once potent military fell to ruin. For two decades, Russia military was starved of men and money, and allowed to rust. Putin has been playing catch-up for the past decade to rebuild his nation's great power status and defend against what Russians see as constant Western plots.

Memories are still raw of how Russia's most secret military technologies were sold to the US during the ultra-corrupt Yeltsin era.

Russia's relatively modest military budget is hardly a threat to the mighty United States. In fact, the only real Russia threat we face is the danger of blundering into a potential nuclear confrontation with Russia in Ukraine, the Black Sea, Syria or Iraq. Great, nuclear-armed powers should never . . . repeat, never . . . engage in direct confrontations.

It appalls and mystifies me that otherwise smart, world-wise people at the New

York Times and the anti-Russian Council on Foreign Relations would even contemplate military conflict with Russia – for what? Mariupol, Ukraine or Idlib, Syria, places no one has ever heard of.

We have never been closer to blundering into nuclear war with Russia than any time since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Or worse, 1983, when a NATO military exercise codenamed Able Archer was misinterpreted by the Soviet military as an incoming attack by NATO.

This ultimately terrifying crisis was played against the background of intense anti-Soviet propaganda by the West, crowned by Ronald Reagan's fulminations against the "Evil Empire," which convinced the Kremlin a Western attack was coming. Nuclear war was just averted thanks to a few courageous officers in the Soviet Air Defense Command. **CT**

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*Eric Margolis is an award-winning, internationally syndicated columnist. As a war correspondent, he covered conflicts in Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Sinai, Afghanistan, Kashmir, India, Pakistan, El Salvador and Nicaragua. His web site is [www.ericmargolis.com](http://www.ericmargolis.com)*

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# Top editor was a spy for Apartheid

**Tim Knight** recommends a book about South Africa's journalists and politicians

It's 1993. A year before South Africa's first-ever democratic election. Small groups of journalists secretly leave South Africa for intensive training workshops at Canada's public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), in Toronto, Canada.

You could call them voortrekkers ("those who go ahead"). They're pioneers sent by the African National Congress (ANC) and other anti-apartheid political and human rights groups to study the ways of democratic journalism.

CBC trainers work with them on storytelling, story focus, story structure, writing and performance. And always – running like a golden thread under every workshop – is an emphasis on journalistic ethics and morals. On journalism as public service. Journalism as telling truth to power. Journalism as platform and guardian of the free marketplace of ideas. Once home, these voortrekkers will be expected to introduce these concepts to the apartheid-serving state broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), in time for the desperately important 1994 election. Somehow,

they're to change the SABC from the propaganda arm of the apartheid government to a broadcaster that reports fairly, honestly and objectively on the election.

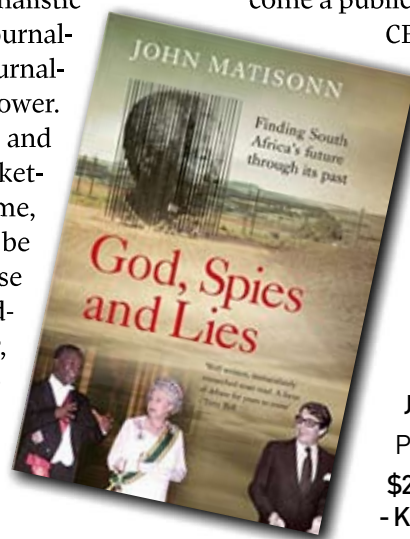
At the time, I'm executive producer of CBC's TV journalism training. My job is to design and lead the voortrekkers' coaching workshops.

While still in Toronto, four of the attendees dream up a political pressure group called the Public Broadcasting Initiative (PBI), aimed straight at the SABC. Once home, they meet top SABC officials, politicians and thought leaders at all levels. They push and probe and question and debate and always, always, they demand that, by election time, the SABC should become a public broadcaster of the stature of

CBC and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

All of them become key agents of change at SABC. They are Sylvia Vollehoven (SABC executive producer, news), David Nid-

**Always – running like a golden thread under every workshop – is an emphasis on journalistic ethics and morals**



**GOD, SPIES AND LIES**  
**Finding South Africa's Future Through Its Past**

John Matisonn

Published by Missing Ink

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 - Kindle Edition)

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Matisonn abhors South Africa's past, is fearful of its present, and sadly pessimistic about its immediate future**

drie (SABC board member), Amina Frense (SABC managing editor, TV news and current affairs), and John Matisonn (producer of SABC's 1994 radio election coverage).

Come election day, international observers rate both the election and SABC's coverage as successful, free and fair. The SABC finally earns the right to the honourable title of public broadcaster.

Now, Matisonn has written *God, Spies and Lies*, subtitled *Finding South Africa's future through its past*, in which he writes of the CBC training workshops: "For SABC television, Canada's CBC was helpful beyond our expectations. . . . It would not have been the same without them."

Matisonn abhors South Africa's past, is fearful of its present, and sadly pessimistic about its immediate future. His book joins a long list that critically examine the country's manifold and manifest problems. For instance, a recent Sunday Times list of the top five new non-fiction books all cover South Africa's brutal, racist, classist politics.

*God, Spies and Lies* is about these politics, of course. But its focus – as seen through Matisonn's hugely experienced eyes – is mostly on the journalists who cover politics and politicians.

Among his journalistic good guys during the apartheid years are Charles Bloomberg (political reporter, Sunday Times), Joe Thlolo (director, Press Council), Hugh Lewin (author, *Bandiet Out of Jail*), Peta Thornycroft (freelance journalist, Zimbabwe), Max du Preez (editor, *Vrye Weekblad*), Tony Heard (editor, Cape Times), Laurence Gandar, Ray Louw, Alister Sparks and Rex Gibson (all editors, *Rand Daily Mail*), and Joel Mervis (editor, Sunday Times).

The big news in the book, though, is Matisonn's charge that the late Tertius Myburgh, powerful, respected editor of the Sunday Times during the apartheid years, was secretly an apartheid spy. According to Matisonn's sources, Myburgh killed

some of his own reporters' stories about the ruling National Party crimes and the immense power and influence of the extreme Afrikaner right-wing secret society, the Broederbond.

"Myburgh betrayed his staff. He betrayed his profession. Most important of all, he betrayed his readers, who were dependent on the media to tell them the truth. . . . The facts are clear. Tertius Myburgh was the mole, and numerous courageous people paid a price when he was editor of the Sunday Times. . . . his own comments show he knew exactly what a traitor he really was."

Matisonn is no admirer of President Jacob Zuma and his wholly-owned ANC, either. His opening paragraph sets the stage: "For a couple of months in the near perfect summer of 1990/1991, Jacob Zuma came to stay in my house . . .

"Twenty-five years later, my former house guest has all but morally bankrupted Nelson Mandela's ruling African National Congress (ANC). President Zuma's vision-free leadership, questionable personal behaviour and attempts to use his political power to distort the judicial system render him no better than Italy's corrupt bunga-bunga partying ex-prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi. How far has this great party fallen!"

But what of the SABC, 21 years after that fair, balanced coverage of South Africa's first democratic election? Does it stay a public broadcaster like CBC and Britain's BBC? Is SABC today a bastion of courageous investigative journalists speaking truth to power, serving the free marketplace of ideas, affecting the comfortable and comforting the affected? Not exactly.

Here's Matisonn on the SABC today: "The door between jobs in the . . . SABC board . . . revolved, entrenched political interference instead of a culture of independence. Conflict . . . was fanned by loyalties to party structures instead of the institutions that paid their salaries." So sad.



God, Spies and Lies is long (448 pages). It's well written, crammed with day-to-day, often complex revelations about political skullduggery Matisonn comes across during his 40 years as journalist and public servant. He seems to have known every major player in the modern South African political diorama, every ANC leader since Oliver Tambo, and every government leader from John Vorster to FW de Klerk to Nelson Mandela to Jacob Zuma.

His book should be read by every journalist needing to understand how easily greedy, self-serving politicians can poison democracy's free marketplace of ideas. Actually, it should be read by everyone who cares anything about democracy, freedom of information and modern South Africa, the former rainbow nation.

Last words are Matisonn's summation in God, Spies and Lies: "For a brief, shining moment, we thought we had harnessed history, and perhaps we had. But history is an unruly mount. No sooner had we turned to take in the view than it broke free, galloping in directions we knew not where. A new generation must embrace its challenge. They inherited a constitution that makes it possible. It's up to them to find the will." **CT**

**This book should be read by every journalist needing to understand how easily greedy, self-serving politicians can poison democracy's free marketplace of ideas**

*Tim Knight is a journalist, filmmaker and communications trainer who's worked for three South African newspapers, Zambia TV, United Press International, ABC, NBC and PBS in New York, and the CBC in Canada. His book, Storytelling and the Anima Factor, is now in its second edition.*

● ColdType will carry an excerpt from God, Spies and Lies in February.

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# Patron saint-to-be of crooks and criminals

Mother Teresa, the next figure in line for sainthood, turns out to have had different standards for the rich than for the poor, writes **Eamonn McCann**

**Propaganda has always been the name of the canonization game. The main reason medieval popes came up with the idea was so the church could take control of the selection of role models for society at large**

It's not the fact that Mother Teresa has been credited with cures for which there is no known disease that renders the plan for her canonization ridiculous. The ridiculousness lies in canonization itself.

Not even the pope is authorized to hand out ceremonial passes to paradise. To qualify for canonization, you have to have made the cut and be resident in heaven already. If you're not in, you can't win. All of which renders the elaborate ceremony planned for next year redundant – apart from its propaganda value, which is, of course, the point.

Propaganda has always been the name of the canonization game. The main reason medieval popes came up with the idea was so the church could take control of the selection of role models for society at large. It's about shaping the world the way you want it to be, about power and influence, not holiness and prayer.

What model of society does the Albanian nun exemplify? Twenty years ago, in January 1996, writing for the Irish magazine *Hot Press*, I phoned the Los Angeles district attorney's office to check whether there had been progress in persuading Mother Teresa to hand back a million dollars stolen from the poor. Not a lot, assistant district attorney Paul Turley told me.

The money had been filched from the pockets of pensioners and small savers by



**Saintly moneygrabber? Mother Teresa.**

the notorious con man, Charles Keating, head of what turned out to be a front for fraud, Lincoln Savings and Loan. Keating had siphoned \$225 million from the accounts of thousands of victims and had bungled a million of this loot to Mother Teresa.

Four years earlier, in 1992, Turley had appealed to Teresa: "If you contact me, I will put you in direct contact with the rightful owners of the property now in your possession." Any developments since, I wondered?

“She has ignored us,” Turley told me. “We have honestly given up on this. It is obvious she is determined to keep it.”

Sentenced to 10 years, Keating may have taken comfort from contemplation of the crucifix on the wall of his cell, personally blessed by Pope John Paul and delivered by a messenger from Mother Teresa.

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It has commonly been suggested, including by commentators skeptical about Mother Teresa’s sanctity, that in this and similar matters she had been blinded by intense religiosity, her mode of thought too other-worldly to appreciate mundane stuff such as money.

As an excuse for the criminal offence of knowingly receiving stolen property, this would be laughed out of any court in the land. A more subtle argument advanced by Catholic traditionalists is that what matters most at a time of ideological turmoil and creeping secularization within the church is the unwavering adherence and global witness she gave to the teachings of the church now most under siege, on contraception, divorce, abortion, etc. It is this, they suggest, that, despite all, makes her a suitable role model for the times we live in.

But this won’t wash either. The journalist Daphne Barak quoted Mother Teresa, in April 1996, in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, commenting on the break-up of the marriage of Princess Diana and Prince Charles: “I think it is such a sad story. Diana is such a sad soul. . . . You know what? It is good that it is over. Nobody was happy. I know I should preach for family love and unity, but in their case. . . .’ Then her

voice ‘trailed off.’”

The masses are told under pain of hell-fire that they must unquestioningly obey the rules of the church, but when it comes to the useful rich and glamorous, immutable laws of God can be amended on the instant.

In October 1994, Mother Teresa sent a message to the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, pleading for outright rejection of contraception and abortion. “Every child is a gift from God,” she wrote. “If you have a child you think is unwanted, give that child to me. I will find it a loving home where it will be cherished as a blessing.”

The Cairo conference was to hear that up to 40,000 children under 12 were dying every day of malnutrition or preventable disease. Mother Teresa’s order was not running any adoption operation anywhere in the world. Her statement was not off-the-cuff or a flight of holy fantasy. It was a written declaration, widely distributed. It was dishonest, manipulative opportunism for which it is hard to find adequate words. “Despicable,” maybe.

In the year before her death in 1997, as a team of doctors flown in from around the world tried by extraordinary means to bring her back to health, one Irish newspaper carried the headline, “World Unites in Prayer For ‘Living Saint.’”

We may hope there’ll be a lot less of that sort of thing in 2016. **CT**

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*Eamonn McCann is an author and activist living in Derry, Northern Ireland. This article first appeared in the Irish Times.*

**It has commonly been suggested, that Mother Teresa had been blinded by intense religiosity, her mode of thought too other-worldly to appreciate mundane stuff such as money**

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# Trump: Vulgar, crude, racist. And correct!

Blustering presidential candidate shows how awful the mainstream US media really is, writes **William Blum**

**Trump could have given Stephanopoulos a veritable heart attack by declaring that the American military, in the course of its wars in recent decades, has been responsible for the deliberate deaths of many journalists**

I think one of the main reasons for Donald Trump's popularity is that he says what's on his mind and he means what he says, something rather rare among American politicians, or perhaps politicians anywhere in the world. The American public is sick and tired of the phoney, hypocritical, answers given by office holders of all kinds. When I read that Trump had said that Senator John McCain was not a hero because McCain had been captured in Vietnam, I had to pause for reflection. Wow! Next the man will be saying that not every American soldier who was in the military in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq was a shining hero worthy of constant media honor and adulation.

When Trump was interviewed by ABC-TV host George Stephanopoulos, former aide to President Bill Clinton, he was asked: "When you were pressed about [Russian President Vladimir Putin's] killing of journalists, you said, 'I think our country does plenty of killing too.' What were you thinking about there? What killing sanctioned by the U.S. government is like killing journalists?"

Trump responded: "In all fairness to Putin, you're saying he killed people. I haven't seen that. I don't know that he has. Have you been able to prove that? Do you know the names of the reporters that he's killed? Because I've been – you know, you've been hearing this, but I haven't seen the name. Now, I think it would be despicable if that

took place, but I haven't seen any evidence that he killed anybody in terms of reporters."

Of course, Trump could have given Stephanopoulos a veritable heart attack by declaring that the American military, in the course of its wars in recent decades, has been responsible for the deliberate deaths of many journalists. In Iraq, for example, there's the Wikileaks 2007 video, exposed by Chelsea Manning, of the cold-blooded murder of two Reuters journalists, the 2003 US air-to-surface missile attack on the offices of Al Jazeera in Baghdad that left three journalists dead and four wounded, and the American firing on Baghdad's Hotel Palestine the same year that killed two foreign news cameramen.

It was during this exchange that Stephanopoulos allowed the following to pass his lips: "But what killing has the United States government done?"<sup>1</sup>

Do the American TV networks not give any kind of intellectual test to their newscasters? Something at a fourth-grade level might improve matters.

Prominent MSNBC newscaster Joe Scarborough, interviewing Trump, was also baffled by Trump's embrace of Putin, who had praised Trump as being "bright and talented." Putin, said Scarborough, was "also a person who kills journalists, political opponents, and invades countries. Obviously



**People were seen in New Jersey apparently celebrating the planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers. But they were Israelis, which would explain all one needs to know about why the story wasn't in the headlines**

**"A lot of stupidiy" – Donald Trump exposes the ignorance of the US media.** (Photo: Gage Skidmore)

that would be a concern, would it not?"

Putin "invades countries . . ." Well, now there even I would have been at a loss as to how to respond. Try as I might I don't think I could have thought of any countries the United States has ever invaded.

To his credit, Trump responded: "I think our country does plenty of killing also, Joe, so, you know. There's a lot of stupidity going on in the world right now, Joe. A lot of killing going on. A lot of stupidity. And that's the way it is." <sup>2</sup>

As to Putin killing political opponents, this, too, would normally go unchallenged in the American mainstream media. But, earlier this year, I listed seven highly questionable deaths of opponents of the Ukraine government, a regime put in power by the United States, which is used as a club against Putin.<sup>3</sup> This, of course, was non-news in the American media.

So that's what happens when the know-nothing American media meets up with a know-just-a-bit-more presidential candidate. Ain't democracy wonderful?

Trump has also been criticized for say-

ing that immediately after the 9-11 attacks, thousands of Middle Easterners were seen celebrating outdoors in New Jersey in sight of the attack location. An absurd remark, for which Trump has been rightfully vilified; but not as absurd as the US mainstream media pretending that it had no idea what Trump could possibly be referring to in his mixed-up manner.

For there were, in fact, people seen in New Jersey apparently celebrating the planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers. But they were Israelis, which would explain all one needs to know about why the story wasn't in the headlines and has since been "forgotten" or misremembered. On the day of the 9-11 attacks, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was asked what the attacks would mean for US-Israeli relations. His quick reply was: "It's very good . . . Well, it's not good, but it will generate immediate sympathy (for Israel)." There's a lot on the internet about these Israelis in New Jersey, who were held in police custody for months before being released. <sup>4</sup>

So here, too, mainstream newspersons

**“We suddenly realized, or at least I did, that these people we were dealing with were human beings like ourselves”**

do not know enough to enlighten their audience.

### **Russia, as explained to Russians by Americans**

There is a Russian website [inosmi = foreign mass media] that translates propagandistic russophobic articles from the Western media into Russian and publishes them so that Russians can see how the Western media tell lies about them day after day. There have been several articles lately, based on polls that show that anti-Western sentiments are increasing in Russia, and blaming it on “Putin’s propaganda.”

This is rather odd because who needs propaganda when the Russians can read the Western media themselves and see firsthand all the lies they puts forth about them and the demonizing of Putin. There are several political-debate shows on Russian television to which they invite Western journalists or politicians; on one there frequently is a really funny American journalist, Michael Bohm, who keeps regurgitating all the Western propaganda while arguing with his Russian counterparts. It’s surreal to watch him display the worst political stereotypes of Americans: Arrogant, gullible, and ignorant. He stands there and lectures high-ranking Russian politicians, “explaining” to them the “real” Russian foreign policy, and the “real” intentions behind their actions, as opposed to anything they say. The man is shockingly irony-impaired. It is as funny to watch as it is sad and scary.

The above paragraphs were written with the help of a woman who was raised in the Soviet Union and now lives in Washington. She and I have discussed US foreign policy on many occasions. We are in very close agreement as to its destructiveness and absurdity.

Just as in the first Cold War, one of the basic problems is that Exceptional Americans have great difficulty in believing that Russians mean well. Apropos this, I’d like

to recall the following written about George Kennan: “Crossing Poland with the first US diplomatic mission to the Soviet Union in the winter of 1933, a young American diplomat named George Kennan was somewhat astonished to hear the Soviet escort, Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov, reminisce about growing up in a village nearby, about the books he had read and his dreams as a small boy of being a librarian.

“We suddenly realized, or at least I did, that these people we were dealing with were human beings like ourselves,” Kennan wrote, “that they had been born somewhere, that they had their childhood ambitions as we had. It seemed for a brief moment we could break through and embrace these people.” 5

It hasn’t happened yet.

Kennan’s sudden realization brings George Orwell to mind: “We have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.”

### **Notes**

1. Robert Parry, “Trump Schools ABC-TV Host on Reality,” Consortiumnews, December 21, 2015
2. Interview of Donald Trump by Joe Scarborough, December 18, 2015
3. William Blum, Anti-Empire Report #138, April 3, 2015
4. See for example: the first three minutes of Core of Corruption --Film 1 – In the Shadows - Part 10 and The Five Dancing Israelis Arrested on 9-11
5. Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men* (1986), p.158

**CT**

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*William Blum* is the author of *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Super Power*, *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Political Memoir*, and *America’s Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else*.  
His web-site is [www.williamblum.org](http://www.williamblum.org)

# Syria explained in 300 words

A poem by **Philip Kraske**

I've been reading Escobar, who explains it all so great,  
Yet I find it's really tough, wondering whom to hate.  
Can't they get this organized, and draw some lines in  
soil?  
The battle map's a train-wreck mush, the hatreds all  
a-roil.

Over here you've got Turkmen, which means they're  
sorta Turk,  
Just enough so they get off for doing Turkey's work.  
Down the road the moderates have set up their own  
shop,  
But just how moderate they are depends on whom  
they pop.

The Russkies don't like either crew, they'd rather keep  
Assad's,  
They bomb the mods and Turks and Daesh, who to  
them are sods,  
Pleasing not the Beltway boys, who really hate believ-  
ing,  
That ISIS can be pretty cool, when it's not neck-cleav-  
ing.

Then the case of Kurdistan, one of history's losers,  
Whacked by Turks and Pres. Saddam, and all of earth's  
big bruisers.

Their men are sharp, their chiefs corrupt, they just  
can't get a break.

They fight IS to our loud cheers; we ought to send a  
cake.

The Sultan watches over all and wants to make his  
mark,

Open up a no-fly zone, make Kurdistan a park,  
He figures half of Syria's his, Iraq and all their oil,  
And one or two good pipelines more will really make  
him royal.

Now let's check on those elites, those guys in linen  
flowing.

They move the pawns and F-15s, humanity forgoing.  
Qatar, the Saudis, Dubai, Iran -- each for their horse  
root

In the race for cash and oil, and souls to save to boot.

Amazing so much shock and awe is caused by pipes-  
in-line,

Uniting wells in Emirates with yonder Seine and  
Rhine.

Though happily I'd do without and ride my bike each  
day,

The chess of state, that never changes. The rest of us  
must pay.

**CT**

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*Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation.*

*His four novels, of varied plots but centring on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009.*

*His website is <http://philipkraske.com>*

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