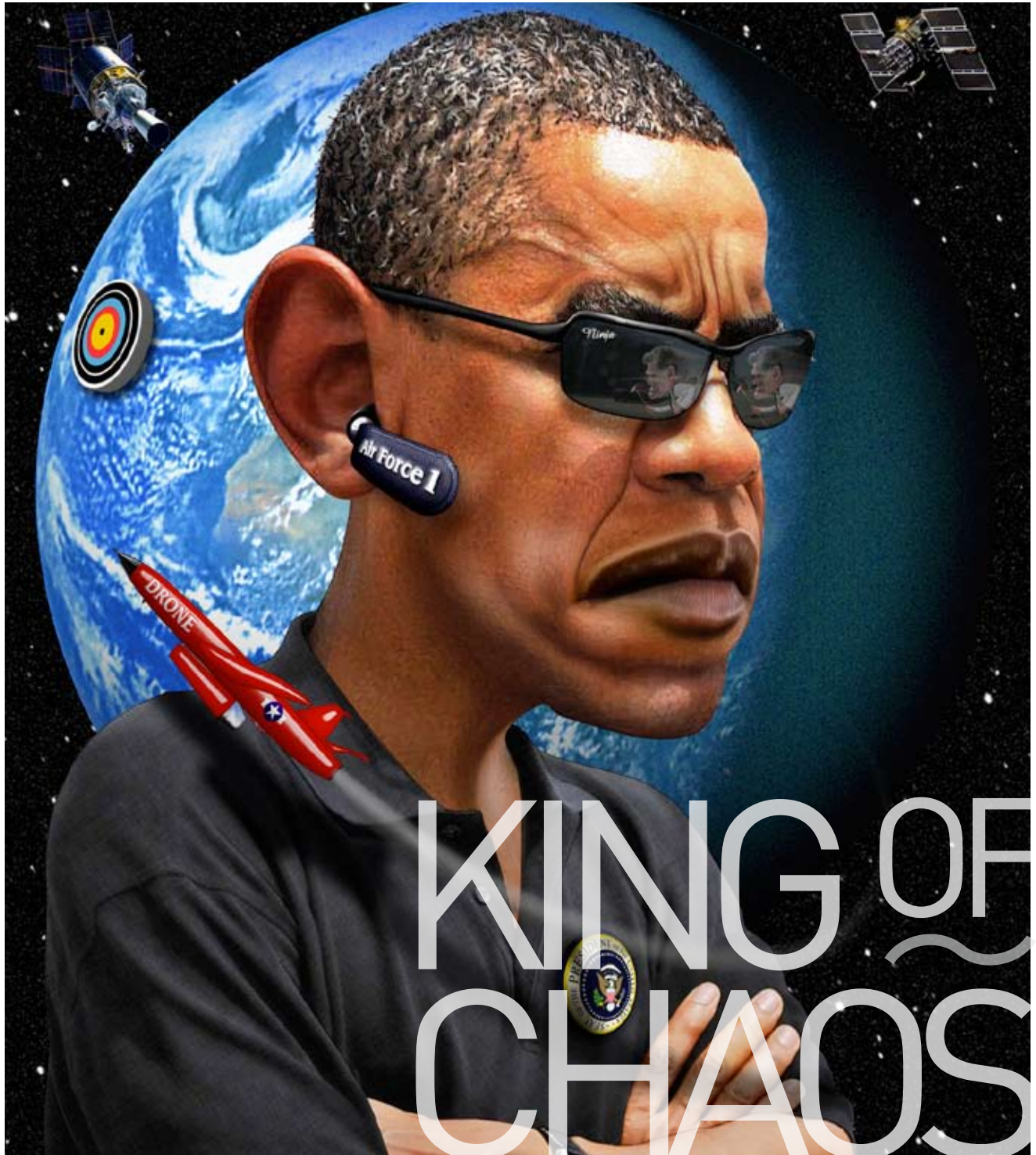


ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 114





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The West and Syria: Media spin vs. reality

The media keeps saying that the West isn't involved in Syria. This isn't true, writes **Ian Sinclair**

The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary," George Orwell noted in his censored preface to his 1945 book *Animal Farm*. "Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban." Orwell went on to explain that, "at any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question. It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is 'not done' to say it."

The corporate media's 'coverage' of Syria adds a twist to Orwell's dictum – inconvenient reports and facts do occasionally appear in respected newspapers and on popular news programs, but they are invariably ignored, decontextualized, or not followed up on. Rather than informing the historical record, public opinion and government policy, these snippets of essential information are effectively thrown down the memory hole.

Instead, the public is fed a steady diet of simplistic, western-friendly propaganda, a key strand of which is that the US has, as Channel 4 News's Paul Mason blindly asserted in January 2016, "stood aloof from the Syrian conflict." This deeply ingrained ignorance was taken to comical lengths when Mason's Channel 4 News colleague



Abandoned Syrian army tank.

Photo: Christiaan Triebert, Wikimedia

Cathy Newman interviewed the former senior US State Department official Anne-Marie Slaughter, with both women agreeing the US had not armed the insurgency in Syria.

In the real world, the US has been helping to arm the insurgency since 2012. US officials told the *Washington Post* last year that the CIA's \$1-billion program had trained and equipped 10,000 rebel fighters. "From the moment the CIA operation was started, Saudi money supported it," notes the *New York Times*. According to Robert

The public is fed a steady diet of simplistic, Western-friendly propaganda

WHOSE FACTS? 1

This warmongering isn't an unfortunate one-off but a longstanding US policy of blocking peace initiatives in times of conflict

Ford, the former American ambassador to Syria, the US “looked the other way,” while fighters it backed “coordinated in military operations” with the al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda’s official affiliate in Syria. The UK, of course, has obediently followed its master to the gates of hell, with Peter Ford, the former UK ambassador to Syria, recently explaining the UK has made things worse by fuelling the conflict in Syria.

And if they are not playing down the West’s interference in Syria, journalists and their political masters are presenting western actions as having benign, peaceful motives. For example, in his official response to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee report on UK military action in Syria, British Prime Minister David Cameron argued that “since the start of the crisis the UK has worked for a political solution in Syria.” The Guardian’s foreign affairs specialist Simon Tisdall echoed this idea of the West’s “basic benevolence,” when, in 2013, he noted in passing that President Obama “cannot count on Russian support to fix Syria.”

Compare this propagandistic framing with what Andrew Mitchell, the former British secretary of state for international development, had to say about the West’s role in the 2012 United Nations peace plans on the BBC Today program earlier this month: “Kofi Annan, the very distinguished former general secretary of the United Nations, came forward with his plan, asked by the UN general-secretary to do so. Part of that plan was to say that [Syrian President Bashar] Assad is part of the problem here and, therefore, by definition, is part of the solution, and therefore he must be included in negotiations. And that was vetoed by the Americans and, alas, by the British government too.”

Mitchell’s astonishing revelation is backed up by two highly respected Middle East experts. In September 2015, Avi Shlaim, professor emeritus of international relations at Oxford University, noted that



Former UK minister Andrew Mitchell said Assad must be included in peace negotiations, but that recommendations was vetoed by the American and British governments.

Photo: Wikimedia

western insistence that Assad must step down sabotaged Annan’s efforts to set up a peace deal and forced his resignation. Professor Hugh Roberts, the former director of the North Africa Project at the International Crisis Group, concurs, writing “the western powers . . . sabotaged the efforts of the UN special envoys, Kofi Annan and then Lakhdar Brahimi, to broker a political compromise that would have ended the fighting.” Indeed, the US secretary of state himself conceded this reality when he recently noted that demanding Assad’s departure up front in the peace process was “in fact, prolonging the war.”

A quick survey of recent history shows this warmongering isn’t an unfortunate one-off but a longstanding US policy of blocking peace initiatives in times of conflict.

In 1999, the US used Serbia's rejection of the Rambouillet Agreement to justify its 78-day bombing campaign. However, the proposed agreement included the military occupation and political control of Kosovo by NATO, and gave NATO the right to occupy the rest of Yugoslavia. It was a document "that no sovereign country on earth would have signed," reporter Jeremy Scahill noted.

Two years later, as the US geared up to bomb and invade Afghanistan, the Taliban raised the idea of handing over Osama bin Laden if the US produced evidence of his involvement in the attack on 9/11. According to the New York Times, "the White House quickly rejected the move," because "it did not 'meet American requirements' that Afghanistan immediately hand over the prime suspect in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon."

Several months into the 2003 Iraq War, the Guardian reported that, "in the few weeks before its fall, Iraq's Ba'athist regime made a series of increasingly desperate peace offers to Washington, promising to hold elections and even to allow US troops to search for banned weapons." Like Afghanistan, the Guardian noted, "the advances were all rejected by the Bush administration, according to intermediaries involved in the talks."

And, finally, in January 2015, the Washington Times highlighted the various attempts made by the Libyan government to push for a negotiated settlement during the 2011 NATO intervention. Citing secret audio recordings between an intermediary working for the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Libyan government, the newspaper noted that the head of the US African Command attempted to negotiate a truce, but was ordered to stand down by Hillary Clinton's State Department. This account resonates with other reports that show how NATO ignored peace initiatives coming from the Libyan government and the African Union.

Of course, some or perhaps all of these peace overtures may have been disingenuous and/or unworkable. However, we will never know because they were never seriously considered or explored by the West in its rush to war.

Key role in prolonging war

Turning back to Syria, the facts clearly show the West, by blocking the UN's peace initiative while continuing to arm the insurgency, played a key role in prolonging and escalating a conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and led to a staggering 11-million refugees.

Russia and Iran, by backing the Assad Government, have also played a central role in prolonging and escalating the war. But, as a British citizen whose taxes fund the British government, my primary concern is the actions of the UK and its allies. As Noam Chomsky has noted, "You're responsible for the predictable consequences of your actions. You're not responsible for the predictable consequences of somebody else's actions."

Roberts clearly understands what the predictable consequences of the US and UK actions in Syria have been: "Western policy has been a disgrace, and Britain's contribution to it should be a matter of national shame."

As always, the government prefers to treat the public like mushrooms – keeping them in the dark and feeding them bullshit. And with our supposedly crusading, disputatious, stropky, and difficult fourth estate unable or unwilling to report basic facts and to connect some very simple dots, what chance does the general public have of ever gaining even a basic understanding of what the West is doing in Syria?

CT

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Ian Sinclair is the author of The March That Shook Blair: An Oral History of 15 February 2003, published by Peace News Press. He tweets at @IanJSinclair.

"Western policy has been a disgrace and Britain's contribution to it should be a matter of national shame"

Deafening silence over Netanyahu's racism

Eamonn McCann discusses the media's double standards over the hateful rhetoric spewed by the Israeli leader

The world has become so used to insults of this sort from Israeli leaders against the Palestinians that it's difficult to whip up interest, much less anger

Is that a shifty silence I hear? Or just a shrug to convey couldn't-care-less? The outburst in February from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – “Will we surround all of the state of Israel with fences and barriers? The answer is yes . . . we must defend ourselves against the wild beasts” – surely merited a mention or two.

But no. Efforts to locate even mild condemnation in the mainstream media have proven futile. It now seems acceptable to refer to Palestinians as “wild beasts,” without any flurry of concern from individuals and institutions that see themselves as sophisticated, enlightened, progressive, and definitely not racist.

One of the probable reasons for the muted reaction is that the world has become so used to insults of this sort from Israeli leaders against the Palestinians that it's difficult to whip up interest, much less anger.

Donald Trump, the semi-deranged billionaire making a bid for the Republican nomination for the US presidency calculates it's necessary to stress, when he talks of Mexicans as thieves and scroungers, that he's not attaching that label to every single Mexican. Usually, he throws this in as an afterthought, a casual addendum. But, still, it's interesting that he feels he has to qualify it.

Netanyahu and a long line of Israeli pre-

decessors feel no need for such restraint. Palestinians are “crocodiles,” “beasts on two legs,” “grasshoppers to be crushed, their heads smashed against boulders,” according to suggestions from previous Israeli prime ministers.

Former chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, Rafael Eitan, summed up his preferred fate for the Palestinians: “When we have settled the land, all the Arabs will be able to do about it will be to scurry around like drugged cockroaches in a bottle.”

Contrast in reactions

Amid this hubbub of hatred, it might have been unreasonable to expect a hullabaloo over Netanyahu's latest contribution to this compendium of bigotry. But I wonder what the reaction would be if such remarks were directed against Jews?

The question is worth asking, if only because, as a matter of fact, the same sort of racism is indeed spat out against Jews. Occasionally, anti-Semites will say they have nothing against Jews, only against Zionists who hold that all of the land of Israel was gifted to them by God – so they can do whatever they want with it and with the indigenous people.

For some, it can be an easy enough step – from condemning the persecutors of Palestine to condemning the Jewish peo-

ple. Thus, solidarity with Palestine can be used as cover for anti-Semitism, which in turn gives Zionists and their fellow travelers an opening to argue that all or almost all campaigners for Palestinian rights are driven by hostility to Jews. A tangled mess, then? One side as twisted as the other? Not exactly. The key consideration in asking what would be made of a politician who publicly referred to Jews as insects has to do not with characterization of the person voicing the sentiment, but characterization of the response.

If it were said that Jewish people should be reduced to the level of drugged cockroaches scurrying about in a bottle, is there an MP or newspaper columnist in the land who would dare respond other than with proper outright condemnation?

So why should it be okay to say such things about Palestinians?

Trump's answer

Several weeks ago, in an interview with the cable news service MSNBC, Donald Trump answered a question which he had been dodging for months: How, in practical terms, did he propose to deliver on his promise to make Mexico pay for the wall that he wants built along the border to keep Mexican immigrants out?

He had an answer: The US spends (he claimed) \$8-billion a year in welfare payments to dependents of "illegal" Mexican immigrants. He'd cut them all off without a cent, use the money to build his wall instead. Not very convincing.

Almost without exception, his political opponents, analysts and commentators let him know that his plan remains not only undeliverable, but distasteful and deeply offensive.

On the same day – February 9 – that Netanyahu, inspecting a construction site along the Jordan border, he was asked about his planned wall, and replied with his reference to "wild beasts."

Anyone who has been watching the



news will know about Trump and his plan for walling Mexico in (or out). But you could have viewed every bulletin in the past month and still know nothing of Netanyahu's blunt explanation of the purpose of Israel's Apartheid Wall.

Worth keeping in mind, too, is that every one of the presidential hopefuls of either US party who have denounced Trump's wall plan supports Netanyahu's scheme for building a wall to cage Palestinians.

CT

You could have viewed every bulletin in the past month and still know nothing of Netanyahu's blunt explanation of the purpose of Israel's Apartheid Wall

Eamonn McCann is a writer and social activist based in Derry, Northern Ireland. This article was first published in the Belfast Telegraph.

The rape of East Timor: 'Sounds like fun ...'

John Pilger, whose film, *Death of a Nation*, revealed the tragedy of tiny East Timor, reports on documents that remind us of the enduring piracy of great power

East Timor was the second holocaust for which Suharto was responsible. A decade earlier, in 1965, he had wrested power in Indonesia in a bloodbath that took more than a million lives

Secret documents found in the Australian National Archives provide a glimpse of how one of the greatest crimes of the 20th-century was executed and covered up. They also help us understand how and for whom the world is run.

The documents refer to East Timor, now known as Timor-Leste, and were written by diplomats in the Australian embassy in Jakarta. The date was November 1976, less than a year after the Indonesian dictator General Suharto seized the then-Portuguese colony on the island of Timor.

The terror that followed has few parallels; not even Pol Pot succeeded in killing, proportionally, as many Cambodians as Suharto and his fellow generals killed in East Timor. Out of a population of almost a million, up to a third were extinguished.

This was the second holocaust for which Suharto was responsible. A decade earlier, in 1965, he had wrested power in Indonesia in a bloodbath that took more than a million lives. The CIA reported: "In terms of numbers killed, the massacres rank as one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century."

This power grab was greeted in the western press as "a gleam of light in Asia" (*Time*). The BBC's correspondent in South East Asia, Roland Challis, later described the cover-up of the massacres as a tri-

umph of media complicity and silence – the "official line" had been that Suharto had "saved" Indonesia from a communist takeover.

"Of course, my British sources knew what the American plan was," he told me. "There were bodies being washed up on the lawns of the British consulate in Surabaya, and British warships escorted a ship full of Indonesian troops, so that they could take part in this terrible holocaust. It was only much later that we learned that the American embassy was supplying names and ticking them off as they were killed. There was a deal, you see. In establishing the Suharto regime, the involvement of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank was part of it. That was the deal."

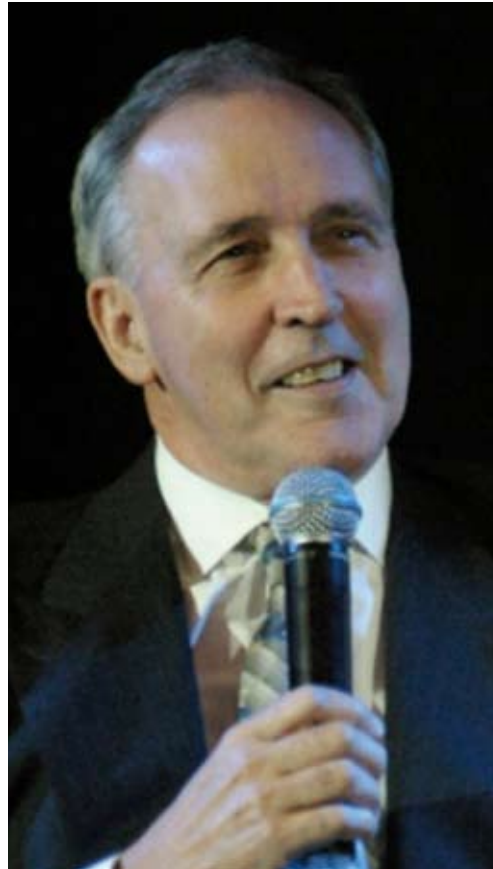
I have interviewed many of the survivors of 1965, including the acclaimed Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who bore witness to an epic of suffering "forgotten" in the West because Suharto was "our man." A second holocaust in resource-rich East Timor, an undefended colony, was almost inevitable.

Seen at a party

In 1994, when I filmed clandestinely in occupied East Timor, I found a land of crosses and unforgettable grief. In my film, *Death of a Nation*, there is a sequence shot on



Indonesia's General Suharto (left) was considered a father figure by Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating.



Photos Wikipedia/Wikimedia

Australia distinguished itself as the only western country formally to recognize Suharto's genocidal conquest of East Timor

board an Australian aircraft flying over the Timor Sea. A party is in progress. Two men in suits are toasting each other in champagne. "This is a uniquely historical moment," babbles one of them, "that is truly, uniquely historical."

This is Australia's foreign minister, Gareth Evans. The other man is Ali Alatas, the principal mouthpiece of Suharto. It is 1989, and they are making a symbolic flight to celebrate a piratical deal they called a "treaty." This allowed Australia, the Suharto dictatorship, and the international oil companies to divide the spoils of East Timor's oil and gas resources.

Thanks to Evans, Australia's then prime minister, Paul Keating – who regarded Suharto as a father figure – and a gang that ran the country's foreign policy establishment, Australia distinguished itself as the

only western country formally to recognize Suharto's genocidal conquest. The prize, said Evans, was "zillions" of dollars.

Members of this gang reappeared recently in documents found in the National Archives by Sara Niner and Kim McGrath, researchers from Monash University in Melbourne. In their own handwriting, senior officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs mock reports of the rape, torture and execution of East Timorese by Indonesian troops. In scribbled annotations on a memorandum that refers to atrocities in a concentration camp, one diplomat wrote: "Sounds like fun." Another wrote: "Sounds like the population are in raptures."

Referring to a report by the Indonesian resistance, Fretilin, that describes Indonesia as an "impotent" invader, another diplomat sneered: "If 'the enemy was im-

EAST TIMOR

"Rape, sexual slavery and sexual violence were tools used as part of the campaign designed to inflict a deep experience of terror, powerlessness and hopelessness upon pro-independence supporters," says the UN

potent,' as stated, how come they are daily raping the captured population? Or is the former a result of the latter?"

The documents, says researcher Sarah Niner, are "vivid evidence of the lack of empathy and concern for human rights abuses in East Timor" in the Department of Foreign Affairs.

"The archives reveal that this culture of cover-up is closely tied to the department's need to recognize Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor so as to commence negotiations over the petroleum in the East Timor Sea."

This was a conspiracy to steal East Timor's oil and gas. In leaked diplomatic cables in August 1975, the Australian ambassador to Jakarta, Richard Woolcott, wrote to Canberra: "It would seem to me that the Department [of Minerals and Energy] might well have an interest in closing the present gap in the agreed sea border and this could be much more readily negotiated with Indonesia . . . than with Portugal or independent Portuguese Timor." Woolcott revealed that he had been briefed on Indonesia's secret plans for an invasion. He cabled Canberra that the government should "assist public understanding in Australia" to counter "criticism of Indonesia."

Green light for Suharto

In 1993, I interviewed C. Philip Liechty, a former senior CIA operations officer in the Jakarta embassy during the invasion of East Timor. He told me: "Suharto was given the green light [by the US] to do what he did. We supplied them with everything they needed [from] M16 rifles [to] US military logistical support . . . maybe 200,000 people, almost all of them non-combatants died. When the atrocities began to appear in the CIA reporting, the way they dealt with these was to cover them up as long as possible, and when they couldn't be covered up any longer, they were reported in a watered-down, very generalized way, so that even our own sourcing

was sabotaged."

I asked Liechty what would have happened had someone spoken out. "Your career would end," he replied. He said his interview with me was one way of making amends for "how badly I feel."

The gang in the Australian embassy in Jakarta appear to suffer no such anguish. One of the scribblers on the documents, Cavan Hogue, told the Sydney Morning Herald: "It does look like my handwriting. If I made a comment like that, being the cynical bugger that I am, it would certainly have been in the spirit of irony and sarcasm. It's about the [Fretilin] press release, not the Timorese." Hogue said there were "atrocities on all sides."

As one who reported and filmed the evidence of genocide, I find this last remark especially profane. The Fretilin "propaganda" he derides was accurate. The subsequent report of the United Nations on East Timor describes thousands of cases of summary execution and violence against women by Suharto's Kopassus special forces, many of whom were trained in Australia. "Rape, sexual slavery and sexual violence were tools used as part of the campaign designed to inflict a deep experience of terror, powerlessness and hopelessness upon pro-independence supporters," says the UN.

Cavan Hogue, the joker and "cynical bugger," was promoted to senior ambassador and eventually retired on a generous pension. Richard Woolcott was made head of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra and, in retirement, has lectured widely as a "respected diplomatic intellectual."

Journalists watered at the Australian embassy in Jakarta, notably those employed by Rupert Murdoch, who controls almost 70 per cent of Australia's capital city press. Murdoch's correspondent in Indonesia was Patrick Walters, who reported that Jakarta's "economic achievements" in East Timor were "impressive," as was

Jakarta’s “generous” development of the blood-soaked territory. As for the East Timorese resistance, it was “leaderless” and beaten. In any case, “no one was now arrested without proper legal procedures.”

In December 1993, one of Murdoch’s veteran retainers, Paul Kelly, then editor-in-chief of the Australian, was appointed by Foreign Minister Evans to the Australia-Indonesia Institute, a body funded by the Australian government to promote the “common interests” of Canberra and the Suharto dictatorship. Kelly led a group of Australian newspaper editors to Jakarta for an audience with the mass murderer. There is a photograph of one of them bowing.

Bullied by Australia

East Timor won its independence in 1999 with the blood and courage of its ordinary people. The tiny, fragile democracy was immediately subjected to a relentless campaign of bullying by the Australian government which sought to manoeuvre it out of its legal ownership of the sea bed’s oil and gas revenue. To get its way, Australia refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and the Law of the Sea and unilaterally changed the maritime boundary in its own favour.

In 2006, a deal was finally signed, Mafia-style, largely on Australia’s terms. Soon afterwards, Prime Minister Mari Alkitiri, a

nationalist who had stood up to Canberra, was effectively deposed in what he called an “attempted coup” by “outsiders.” The Australian military, which had “peace-keeping” troops in East Timor, had trained his opponents.

In the 17 years since East Timor won its independence, the Australian government has taken nearly \$5-billion in oil and gas revenue, money that belongs to its impoverished neighbour.

Australia has been called America’s “deputy sheriff” in the South Pacific. One man with the badge is Gareth Evans, the foreign minister filmed lifting his champagne glass to toast the theft of East Timor’s natural resources. Today, Evans is a lectern-trotting zealot promoting a brand of war-mongering known as RTP, or Responsibility to Protect. As co-chair of a New York-based Global Centre, he runs a US-backed lobby group that urges the international community to attack countries where “the Security Council rejects a proposal or fails to deal with it in a reasonable time.” The man for the job, as the East Timorese might say. **CT**

John Pilger’s film Cambodia Year Zero, which has been credited with alerting the world to the terrors of the Pol Pot regime, was recently named one of ITV’s television’s 60 greatest programs.

Australia refused to recognise the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and the Law of the Sea and unilaterally changed the maritime boundary in its own favour

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Guantánamo's deeper, darker, meaning

John Perkins on the further nefarious adventures of the West's economic hit men . . .

Why should we subject Cuba or any other country to doing what we ourselves dare not do? This is not just seen as a double standard; it is viewed by foreigners as outright cowardice

The other night on John Oliver's HBO program, I saw a funny montage of President Obama repeatedly stating his intention to close Guantánamo. In the beginning, the youthful president was unequivocal. But with each successive news clip – and as his hair became increasingly grayer – Mr. Obama became less emphatic. He was practically conciliatory in his last public statement about closing the offshore prison. As I said, it was supposed to be funny. But the reality of the situation is not a laughing matter.

Guantánamo represents a monumental failure in US policy and diplomacy since 9/11. It defies everything the US stands for. As I travel around the world, people everywhere want to know why we perpetuate such an affront to democracy and the justice system that we idealize to the rest of the world, a system supposedly based on “innocent until proven guilty.”

Why our elected officials are so opposed to transferring prisoners to sites in the continental United States may seem easy to understand. However, it begs the question: Why should we subject Cuba or any other country to doing what we ourselves dare not do? This is not just seen as a double standard; it is viewed as outright cowardice.

More than 10 years ago in Confessions

of an Economic Hit Man, I first exposed a group of seemingly legitimate international dealmakers as the Economic Hit Men (EHMs) we actually were. Waiting in the shadows were jackal assassins who stepped in when our EHM activities were not enough to get the job done. At the time, the job was to con developing countries out of billions of dollars by saddling them with overburdening debt. To make matters worse, we stipulated that the loans were to be used to hire our rather expensive companies to build infrastructure projects.

Money earmarked for education, healthcare and other social programs was diverted by the cost of the projects to pay interest on the loans, reinforcing a vicious circle that ensured that these countries remained in servitude to the US and global corporations. It was a system secured by fear. Leaders who protested this unfair system were overthrown or assassinated.

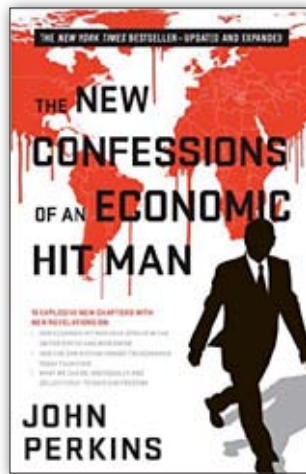
In recent years, EHMs have radically expanded their ranks and adopted new disguises and tools. Since I left that occupation and wrote my book about it, we in the United States have been “hit” – badly. It is no longer exploitation of the Third World that we and the rest of the world can choose to ignore. The entire world has been victimized by these economic hits.

People who are paying attention recognize that the world teeters on the brink of disaster – economic, political, social, and environmental disaster. The refusal of our elected officials to deny basic legal and human rights to prisoners in Guantánamo is a dark metaphor for the attack on the legal and moral fabric of American society in general.

Many of our politicians, including senators and congressional representatives, have taken on the roles of EHMs. And the thousands of other men and women who pass through the “revolving door” of government certainly don’t identify themselves as EHMs. They work for consulting or law firms and go by euphemistic titles such as counselor, consultant, or adviser in government affairs – just as I officially was chief economist for a highly regarded consulting firm.

However, their real job is – as mine was – to con governments and the public into submitting to policies that make the rich richer and the poor poorer. This is no less true here at home than anywhere else in the world. These EHMs are paid to support and expand a global corporate empire. They hide in the shadows, but their influence is immeasurable. They spread the tentacles of a death economy across the planet. It is an economy based not only on debt, but on militarization, fear, and the destruction of resources.

And let’s not forget the jackals. In my day, they mostly were assigned to foreign lands. In the aftermath of 9/11, fear has driven many Americans to sacrifice privacy and freedom and give the NSA, the CIA, the FBI, and other agencies unprecedented powers. Tools perfected overseas, including drones, computer hacking, and



HIT MAN: John Perkins’ book, The New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man.

surveillance aircraft, are now used to spy on citizens of the United States. Are we that far removed from the fate of those imprisoned in Guantánamo?

The stubborn refusal of our officials to address the crimes perpetrated by the US government at Guantánamo is but the tip of the iceberg. Since 9/11, the almost imperceptible decimation of our rights as Americans – not to mention our incomes – has occurred with systematic, and unconstitutional, efficiency.

So, as we listen to the debate over the future of Guantánamo and the people who have been imprisoned there without habeas corpus or any rights whatsoever, without having been accused of any specific crime, let us ask ourselves what message this sends to the world and also what it implies about our own future – and liberties.

In *The New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, my just-released follow-up to the earlier book, I have more to say about the EHMs and jackals of today and why they must be stopped. I offer strategies that each of us can take to assure that this broken system ends so that we can rebuild a world that offers a sustainable future for all living beings.

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John Perkins has written nine books that have been on the New York Times bestseller list for more than 70 weeks and translated into more than 30 languages. His new book – New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man (Berrett-Koehler) – came out Feb, 2016. His previous books include Confessions of an Economic Hitman and Hoodwinked: An Economic Hitman Reveals Why the World Financial Markets Imploded – and What We Need to Do to Remake Them. This article first appeared online at Common Dreams – www.commondreams.org

Tools perfected overseas, including drones, computer hacking, and surveillance aircraft, are now used to spy on citizens of the United States. Are we that far removed from the fate of those imprisoned in Guantánamo?

Live and let die

Did Michel Foucault predict Europe's refugee crisis?
asks **Stephane J. Baele**

It is striking to watch European societies investing so much in health at home and, at the same time, erecting ever-more impermeable legal and material barriers to keep refugees at bay, actively contributing to human deaths

In March 1976, philosopher Michel Foucault described the advent of a new logic of government, specific to western liberal societies. He called it biopolitics. States were becoming obsessed with the health and well-being of their populations.

And, sure enough, 40 years later, western states rarely have been more busy promoting healthy food, banning tobacco, regulating alcohol, organizing breast cancer checks, and churning out information on the risk probabilities of this or that disease.

Foucault never claimed this was a bad trend – it saves lives, after all. But he did warn that paying so much attention to the health and wealth of one population necessitates the exclusion of those who are not entitled to – and are perceived to endanger – this health maximization programme.

Biopolitics is, therefore, the politics of live and let die. The more a state focuses on its own population, the more it creates the conditions of possibility for others to die, “exposing people to death, increasing the risk of death for some people.”

Rarely has this paradox been more apparent than in the crisis that has seen hundreds of thousands of people seeking asylum in Europe over the past few years. It is striking to watch European societies

investing so much in health at home and, at the same time, erecting ever more impermeable legal and material barriers to keep refugees at bay, actively contributing to human deaths.

The conflict in the Middle East is a deadly war. Most estimates suggest 300,000 have been killed in Syria alone. The conflict has shown us some of the most gruesome practices that war can produce, including the gassing of several thousands of civilians in Damascus in 2013. Extremist groups, such as Islamic State, display unimaginable levels of violence. They have beheaded people with knives or explosives, burned people locked in cages, crucified people, thrown people from the tops of buildings, and, more recently exploded people locked in a car (a child supposedly detonated the bomb). This violence has been exported to Europe. Some of the biggest Syrian cities now look pretty much like Stalingrad in 1943.

Inevitably, people escape – just like, for example, the Belgians who fled their country in the first years of World War I (250,000 to the UK alone, with up to 16,000 individuals arriving per day).

Keep out and stay out

This emigration is inevitable simply because normal life has become impossible

Faced with this disaster in its neighbourhood, what do the EU and its member states do? Exactly what Foucault predicted. Germany apart, they compete in imagination to design policies making sure refugees don't arrive, and send ever-clearer deterrent signals.

Austria has unilaterally fixed quotas on the number of asylum seekers that will be accepted at its border each day, effectively leaving bankrupt Greece to handle the burden of the influx alone.

A week previously, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls announced that France and Europe "cannot accept more refugees." His country originally agreed to receive 30,000 refugees over two years. To put that in perspective in terms of population size, if France was a village of 2,200 inhabitants, it would accept no more than a single refugee over that time.

Still in France, authorities are destroying parts of the settlements near Calais where migrants (many of them children) are living in appalling conditions.

In Denmark, police are now permitted to seize valuables from refugees, stripping them of almost all that's left of their property. Slovakia wants only to accept Christian Syrian refugees, and no more than 200 of them, arguing that Muslims would never feel at home or be accepted by the local population anyway.

Meanwhile, the UK is more preoccupied than ever about "regaining the sovereignty of its border" (even though it isn't in the Schengen passport-free area). Belgium has suspended its own participation in Schengen and reintroduced border checks.

Western states are building an increasingly deadly border control policy and importing military technologies to design sophisticated control systems and impassable fences in Greece, Bulgaria and the Spanish enclaves in Morocco. This truly creates what Foucault called the "conditions of possibility for others to die." Syrians are either left to struggle in Syria, or undertake highly risky journeys towards a safe but



An exhausted Syrian man is dragged out of the water migrant families from Syria arrive in an inflatable dinghy on the island of Kos after crossing a 3-mile stretch of the Aegean Sea from Turkey. Photo: Freedom House

fully sealed place.

More or less complex justifications are built to justify this policy, but all can easily be rebutted on both rational and moral grounds. The only reasoning that remains is Foucault's. Explaining why a society so obsessed by health is capable of (more or less indirectly) killing people who could actually contribute to this health, Foucault throws a powerful word: racism, broadly understood.

Later confirmed by thousands of experiments in social psychology, Foucault's contention was that for people to find extreme policies normal and even moral, they have to perceive those who die as different, not as members of their own group.

This is why the UK welcomed 250,000 Belgians with tea and cake in 1914-1916, while today it in one way or another contributes, together with most other EU countries, to the deaths of thousands of human beings who have already escaped a war led by a dictatorial regime and the most violent (quantitatively and perhaps qualitatively) terrorist group of all time. What morality remains among European states is evaporating. **CT**

If France was a village of 2,200 inhabitants, it would accept no more than a single refugee over that time

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Stephane J Baele is a lecturer in international studies and security at England's University of Exeter. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

IN THE PICTURE

Montreal march foils Euro-racists

Counter-protests halt PEGIDA's anti-Muslim rally in Montreal. Photos: **Martin Ouellet**

"We know there's racists out there, we know there's Islamophobes out there, we know there's fascists out there, but what's different today is that they're trying to march publicly in a working class, immigrant area"

A march by Canadian members of the German-based, anti-Islam, anti-immigration group, PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West), was halted by demonstrators in Montreal on February 6. The racist group, launched in Dresden two years ago, has seen a dramatic rise in support in Europe after last year's massive influx of refugees from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

PEGIDA hoped to herald its breakthrough in North America with the Montreal march, timed to coincide with anti-immigration demonstrations in several European cities. But the march, which was due to pass in front of several mosques and Muslim community centres, was abandoned after several hundred counter-protestors, led by Jaggi Singh, of the No One Is Illegal activist group, arrived at the same venue, half an hour before the PEGIDA march was due to take place in the largely Muslim Montreal area known as Little Maghreb.

"We know there's racists out there, we know there's Islamophobes out there, we know there's fascists out there, but what's different today is that they're trying to march publicly in a working class, immi-



Activist Jaggi Singh, leads the counter-protest.



Above: A policeman points to his helmet after being asked by a demonstrator for his badge number.

Left: A police officer yells at a protestor, who reacts with a one-finger salute.

IN THE PICTURE



The cops use their batons to keep protestors away as the only arrest of the day takes place.

grant area that is predominantly North African,” he said.

Singh told CBC News that Montreal mayor Denis Coderre had been smart to denounce PEGIDA after the march was announced, but recent events in Montreal showed that the city was not friendly towards Muslims.

In recent months, he said, zoning bylaws had been changed to prohibit religious organizations, and a new radicalization tip-line had been put in place after seven Montreal-area residents had reportedly travelled to Syria to join jihadists.

“Islamophobia is being instrumentalized and is being used by various parts of the political class,” Singh told the CBC. “A handful of folks may or may not have gone to Syria, and suddenly we need a special hotline on extremism. This is being used to create a social crisis,” said Singh. **Tony Sutton**



Above and right: Families pass by, wondering what the fuss is all about.



A protestor wearing a Guy Fawkes mask is arrested by police, allegedly for touching a police cruiser.



The photographer

Martin Ouellet

is a Montreal-based freelance photojournalist, who mainly shoots protests and political gatherings. He began taking photographs after the huge students' strike of 2012, in an effort to portray events the mainstream sometimes ignore.

Murderous police in the City of Love

When it comes to people of colour, the police make San Francisco 'Baghdad by the Bay,' writes **Rebecca Gordon**

A crowd of people watched as what CNN described as "a sea of police officers" surrounded Woods and shot him dead

In the photo, five of Beyoncé's leather-clad, black-bereted dancers raise their fists in a Black Power salute. The woman in the middle holds a hand-lettered sign up for the camera, bearing three words and a number – Justice 4 Mario Woods. Behind them, the crowd at Levi's Stadium, home of the San Francisco 49ers, is getting ready for the second half of Super Bowl 50, but the game's real fireworks are already over.

The women in the photo had just finished backing Beyoncé's homage to the Black Panthers and Malcolm X during her half-time appearance, when two San Francisco Bay Area Black Lives Matter activists managed to grab a few words with them. Rheema Emy Calloway and Ronnisha Johnson asked if they'd make a quick video demanding justice for Mario Woods. "From the look on the faces of the dancers, they'd already heard about the case," Calloway told the Guardian.

Who was Mario Woods and why did Calloway and Johnson want the world to know that his life mattered? The answer: On December 2, 2015, Mario Woods was executed in broad daylight by officers of the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), and the event was filmed.

Woods was a 26-year-old African-American, born and raised in San Francisco's Bayview district, one of the city's few remaining largely black neighbourhoods. (In

1980, right before I moved to San Francisco, African-Americans made up almost 13 per cent of the city's population. Today, the figure is around six per cent and shrinking.) Woods died when police attempted to arrest him because they believed that, earlier in the day, he had stabbed another man in the arm. Like many victims of police violence, Woods had mental health problems. Indeed, his autopsy's toxicology report showed that, when he died, his system contained a mix of medications (both prescribed and self-administered), including anti-depressants, speed, and marijuana.

But it was the way he died that brought Mario Woods a brief bit of posthumous notoriety. His death was, like Beyoncé's dancers, captured on video. A crowd of people watched as what CNN described as "a sea of police officers" surrounded Woods and shot him dead. At least two people recorded cell-phone videos of what looks eerily like an execution by firing squad.

Woods, his back to a wall, one leg injured from earlier rounds of non-lethal projectiles, attempts to limp past the half-circle of police. Arms at his sides, he sidles along, until an officer blocks his way and opens fire. Three seconds and at least 20 shots later, he lies in a heap on the sidewalk. Police said he was carrying a knife, although this is not at all clear from the video. One thing is clear, however: Woods



SUPER BOWL PROTEST: One of Beyoncé's dancers holds a sign demanding justice for a man shot more than 20 times by police in San Francisco.

Photo: Jamilah King/Twitter

For once, the SFPD had gone too far, and the city ended up paying out \$250,000 (a pittance even then) to settle a class action suit by the victims

was not threatening anyone when he was gunned down.

San Francisco is known around the world for its gentle vibe, its Left Coast politics, its live-and-let-live approach to other people's lifestyles – except when it comes to the police. For many of them, “live and let live” does not seem to apply to everyone, especially not to communities of colour, and in the not-too-distant past to LGBT folk either. I remember, for instance, the infamous October 6, 1989, Castro Sweep, “when police responded to a non-violent AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) demonstration for AIDS funding by occupying an entire gay neighborhood called the Castro (named for its main commercial street). They ran into bars and restaurants, dragging patrons out to the sidewalks and beating them with truncheons.

I was working some blocks away at the headquarters of the Yes on S campaign,

supporting what now seems like a quaint ballot measure (which failed) aimed at creating domestic partnerships in the City of Love. A bleeding man came stumbling into our office shouting that the police were rioting in the Castro. For once, the SFPD had gone too far, and the city ended up paying out \$250,000 (a pittance even then) to settle a class action suit by the victims. A couple of police captains were finally disciplined, but Chief of Police Frank Jordan was not penalized, and went on to serve as mayor from 1992 to 1996. The Castro Sweep might hold a bigger place in the city's memory and history, had the Loma Prieta earthquake not shaken San Francisco 11 days later.

Cops of colour

Once a mostly white department – at whom demonstrators used to chant, “Racist, sexist, anti-gay, SFPD go away!” – the

SEEKING JUSTICE

Two officers took cover behind a patrol car, while several others, carrying what witnesses said looked like rifles, took up positions behind Nieto. One of the officers behind the police car, yelled, "Stop"

city's police force is now significantly more diverse. Today, women, people of colour, and openly LGBT folk, all wear the blue, but a hard core of the old guard remains. With them remains a still-dominant culture of sexism, homophobia, racism, and impunity. In 2015, a series of text messages involving at least 10 different SFPD members came to light during a corruption case against one of them, Ian Fruminger. Sent between 2010 and 2012, these messages revealed just how ugly the attitudes of that hard core are – and how entitled they seem to feel to end the lives of people they believe deserve it.

Here's a sample: Fruminger texted a friend who was an SFPD officer, "I hate to tell you this but my wife [sic] friend is over with their kids and her husband is black! If [sic] is an Attorney but should I be worried?"

He wrote back: "Get ur pocket gun. Keep it available in case the monkey returns to his roots. Its [sic] not against the law to put an animal down."

Furminger responded, "Well said!"

When the city moved to fire the officers involved, a judge ruled that the police department had missed a legal deadline for disciplinary action.

Not the First Time

Mario Woods was hardly the first man shot by the police in my adopted hometown. In fact, in the last couple of years two such killings happened in my neighborhood.

Alejandro "Alex" Nieto died on Bernal Heights. It's a hilltop near my house where people go to run, often with their dogs, and take in glorious views of the city that San Francisco Chronicle columnist Herb Caen used to call "Baghdad by the Bay" to emphasize its exotic character, long before Iraq became part of the Axis of Evil. Alex Nieto, a community college student who made his living working as a security guard, came from the largely Latino and immigrant-populated Mission District.

On the night of March 21, 2014, Nieto sat on a bench on Bernal Heights to eat a burrito before going to work. On his hip was the taser he carried on the job. An anonymous call to 911 reported a man sitting in the park with a gun on his hip, and the SFPD responded.

In January 2016, his parents, Refugio and Elvira Nieto, would finally file a wrongful death suit against Chief of Police Greg Suhr, up to 25 as-yet-unidentified police officers, and the city and county of San Francisco. The suit alleges that as their son, having finished his burrito, was "casually" walking down a jogging path towards the park entrance, the police arrived. Two officers took cover behind a patrol car, while several others, carrying what witnesses said looked like rifles, took up positions behind Nieto. One of the officers behind the police car, yelled, "Stop." Here, in the words of the suit, is what happened next:

"Within seconds a quick volley of bullets was fired at Mr. Nieto. No additional orders or any other verbal communication was heard between the first officer yelling 'stop' and the initial volley of gunfire that rang out. Mr Nieto fell to the ground. After a brief pause of just a second or two, a second barrage of shots were fired. The officers' bullets struck Mr. Nieto in his forehead and at least nine other places leaving his body grossly disfigured and mortally wounded."

The police claimed that Nieto pointed his taser at them, and they had to kill him. But eyewitnesses say that he never threatened anyone. Instead, as Sergeant Fruminger might have expressed it, those police officers evidently decided to "put him down" like a dangerous animal. The SFPD has never even released the names of those involved in Nieto's death. (In the civil suit, they are referred to as John Doe 1 through 25.) As far as anyone knows, none of them have ever been disciplined in any way. Alex Nieto's parents continue to tend a little shrine on Bernal Heights where he died.

On February 26, 2015, a few blocks from

my house, two undercover police officers shot Amilcar Perez Lopez, a 20-year-old Guatemalan man, six times in the back. The Mission District Episcopal church that I belong to helped raise money for his family. As the members of my church would come to understand from them, he was working in the United States without documents, and was the sole support for his parents and younger siblings back home in Guatemala. Through his efforts, he'd sent them enough money to bring electricity and running water to their thatched roof adobe house.

On the day he died, he was involved in some kind of altercation with a man who may have accused him of stealing his bicycle. After that ended, according to the civil suit his parents brought against the city, he was walking home along Folsom Street when accosted by those undercover police officers, named in the suit as Craig Tiffe and Eric Riboli. The two "surreptitiously rushed at Amilcar from behind." One of them got him in a "bear hug." Amilcar spoke very little English. It's likely he had no idea that they were police officers. In any case, he managed to get free and started running down the sidewalk. That's when they shot him.

The official police story was that he lunged at them with a knife and the officers had to shoot him to save their own lives. And that story might have stuck, had the family's attorney not commissioned a private autopsy, which was performed by Dr A. J. Chapman, a forensic pathologist in Santa Rosa, California. The city had already done its own autopsy when Dr. Chapman received Amilcar's body, but had issued no report. Chapman found that Amilcar had taken six shots in the back, five to the torso and right arm, and one to the back of his head. If he was shot while attacking the two officers, why did the bullets strike him from behind?

It took the city's medical examiner's office five months to release its autopsy,

which ultimately concluded the same thing. What might that report have said if activists had not arranged for a private, unbiased report? There's no way to know.

In the aftermath of Michael Brown's shooting death in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, many white people woke up to a reality that was hardly news in most communities of colour where death-by-police is all too common. What's new is that the rest of us are suddenly hearing about the Eric Garner, Freddie Grays, and Sandra Blands who die literally every day in this country.

Occupying force

The rest of the US is beginning to understand what the police already represent to so many communities from Ferguson to Baltimore to Waller County, Texas, to – yes – San Francisco. Far from seeing the police as a source of help and protection, many Americans feel the same way about them as people living under corrupt authoritarian regimes feel about their police or armies. They see them as an occupying force, not there to protect and serve, but to frighten and extort.

Many Americans are not used to thinking of our police as agents of extortion, but a recent Justice Department (DOJ) report on the police and the municipal courts of Ferguson, for instance, tells a different story. The department found that, "City officials have consistently set maximizing revenue as the priority for Ferguson's law enforcement activity. Ferguson generates a significant and increasing amount of revenue from the enforcement of code provisions." The Harvard Law Review reported that in 2013, Ferguson issued more arrest warrants than the city has residents – one and a half for every citizen. The report adds: "In Ferguson, residents who fall behind on fines and don't appear in court after a warrant is issued for their arrest (or arrive in court after the courtroom doors close, which often happens just five minutes after the session is set to start for

The autopsy found that Amilcar had taken six shots in the back, five to the torso and right arm, and one to the back of his head. If he was shot while attacking the two officers, why did the bullets strike him from behind?

SEEKING JUSTICE

Maybe Herb Caen was more prescient than he knew when he called San Francisco Baghdad by the Bay. Maybe we should not be surprised when police forces claim impunity for crimes they commit against the communities of color they “serve”

the day) are charged an additional \$120 to \$130 fine, along with a \$50 fee for a new arrest warrant and 56 cents for each mile that police drive to serve it. Once arrested, everyone who can't pay their fines or post bail (which is usually set to equal the amount of their total debt) is imprisoned until the next court session (which happens three days a month). Anyone who is imprisoned is charged \$30 to \$60 a night by the jail.”

After the Justice Department released the report, the city spent six months negotiating with the DOJ on a complete overhaul of its police and courts. But when Ferguson's own negotiators brought this proposed “consent decree” to the city council, the council members rejected it. So the Justice Department has announced that it will sue Ferguson to force it to make changes that the city insists will cost too much. “There is no cost for constitutional policing,” says Attorney General Loretta Lynch. She's right. What she didn't say, because she shouldn't have to, is that the costs of unconstitutional policing include ravaged communities and a divided nation.

Information hard to get

In many places it's hard to get information about what goes on inside police forces because a thicket of laws protects them. In California, a 1978 law, signed by Jerry Brown in his first go-round as governor, makes it almost impossible to learn anything about the police officers involved in the deaths of Alex Nieto and Amilcar Perez Lopez, or whether their records reflect significant prior complaints or charges. The Modesto Bee reports that under this law: “Peace officer personnel records are confidential, including personal data, promotion, appraisal and discipline records, and ‘any other information the disclosure of which would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.’ Only a judge can order their release as part of a criminal case or lawsuit.”

This makes it difficult, for example, to know whether a particular officer has a record of brutality complaints, or indeed whether a whole police department has such a record. Civil rights attorney and former justice of the California Supreme Court Cruz Reynoso told the Bee that citizens seeking information about police killings face “a wall of silence.”

Here in San Francisco, we might finally shake some of that information loose. In January, the Board of Supervisors responded to organized grassroots pressure by voting unanimously to request a Department of Justice review of the police department. We can only hope that when the DOJ releases its report on San Francisco's police, my city will respond better than Ferguson did. We need more than a thorough housecleaning at the SFPD, starting at the top with Police Chief Greg Suhr. The whole community, indeed the whole country, would do well to rethink why we have police and what we really want them to do. Not shooting so many people might be a good place to start.

Maybe Herb Caen was more prescient than he knew when he called San Francisco Baghdad by the Bay. Maybe we should not be surprised when police forces claim impunity for crimes they commit against the communities of colour they “serve.” They're only doing on a small scale what the United States does on the international stage – when it claims the right to bomb, invade, and occupy foreign countries, without accepting any responsibility for the human misery that results. **CT**

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Crime Garden

Paul Lashmar and **Dick Hobbs** tell how London's jewellery district became a target of a gang of old-age villains who made off with £14-million

In January, seven men were found guilty of the largest burglary in English legal history. The previous April, after months of planning, the burglars had drilled their way into the Hatton Garden Safety Deposit Ltd premises at 88-90 Hatton Garden in central London. They bored a 50-centimetre hole through the thick, concrete wall surrounding the underground deposit box room and broke into 73 boxes containing valuables worth around £14-million.

This was a major undertaking that required complex planning, specialist equipment, neutralizing security, getting copies of the vault keys and a great deal of bravado. They might have pulled it off, had one of the robbers not used his own distinctive white Mercedes while casing the joint. This was recorded by CCTV, and later provided Scotland Yard detectives with a vital clue to help trace the criminal gang.

For several weeks, the Yard kept the suspects under surveillance before making a series of arrests. They recovered a portion of the loot, but two-thirds of the valuables stolen – jewellery, precious metals, precious gems, antiquities, money and much more – are unrecovered.

In sentencing six of the gang members, Judge Christopher Kinch said their crime caused loss “on an unprecedented scale” and ranked among the worst offences of its type. John “Kenny” Collins, Danny Jones,



London's Hatton Garden.

Photo: www.mastermeltgroup.com

Terry Perkins and William Lincoln were sentenced to seven years in jail. Carl Wood got six years and Hugh Doyle, was given a suspended sentence. “Mastermind” Brian Reader will be sentenced later due to ill health.

The Hatton Garden burglars were led by Reader, 76, who was given the sobriquet “Diamond Geezer” for his dubious endeavours. Two other members of the team were 75 and 67, and several were in their 50s at the time of theft. The robbery may be an epitaph for the old Hatton Garden – and its mastermind a symbol of old-world crime “capers.”

Reader had been a frequent face in Hat-

The burglars were led by Reader, 76, who was given the sobriquet “Diamond Geezer” for his dubious endeavours

CASHING OUT

The catalyst for Hatton Garden becoming the jewellery centre of the world for a century was when De Beers, the diamond mining corporation, set up its headquarters nearby on Holborn Viaduct in the 1870s

ton Garden for many decades, plying his criminal trade, including an earlier role in “fencing” £26-million in gold from the 1983 Brinks Mat robbery at Heathrow, for which he was jailed.

In the Hatton 'hood'

As a result of the Hatton Garden Heist, interest has been revived in this remarkable area of London with a very particular trading culture. Our research shows that the area has functioned as an enabling location for major crime for decades. On the western border of the City of London, Hatton Garden, or “The Garden,” was until recently the world centre for jewellery, and has been home to many famous names of the precious stones and metals trade. Rows of nondescript modern and grimy Victorian buildings carry names such as Diamond House, Minerva House, and The London Diamond Club, while jewellery shop signs advertise “Cash for gold,” “Kruggerands” and “valuations.”

Hatton Garden lies between the areas of Clerkenwell, Holborn and Farringdon. The main thoroughfare, Hatton Garden proper, runs between the bustling Leather Lane in the west to Farringdon Road in the east. In medieval times, much of the area was open fields and gardens, known as Ely Place. They were owned by the bishops of Ely, and, in 1286, the then-bishop built St Etheldreda's Church. Accommodation – “a Citie habitation well becoming bishops to dwell in” – was built later for the bishops of Ely after they attended parliament. Following the reformation, Queen Elizabeth I gave one of her favoured courtiers, Sir Christopher Hatton – “who danced with grace and had a very fine form and a very fine face” – permission to live there.

The area is full of secret places and mysterious buildings. The monks of Ely had dug secret tunnels round the garden, and the River Fleet was channelled into a network of underground waterways. Inside the buildings, through dingy, badly lit doorways and

up rickety wooden stairs, were once warrens of small rooms, rented out to jewellery makers. Metal doors and multiple locks protected the craftsmen – and also helped leading figures in London's underworld avoid the prying eyes of the law.

Jewellers gravitated to the area during the 1830s, to be near the gold refiner Johnson Matthey, or Johnson & Cock as it was known then. But the catalyst for Hatton Garden becoming the jewellery centre of the world for a century was when De Beers, the diamond mining corporation, set up their headquarters nearby, on Holborn Viaduct in the 1870s.

Jewish traders many of whom had fled from pogroms in Eastern Europe, began moving into the area during Queen Victoria's reign, and, after a few years, dominated Hatton Garden's jewellery trade. Another wave of skilled Jewish craftsmen arrived in the 1930s, fleeing from the Nazis.

Hatton Garden's strange business rituals often took place on the street or in cafes such as “The Nosherie,” a veneer-panelled establishment in Greville Street, where men in camel-hair coats inspected “pieces” of jewellery through eyeglasses and shook hands on deals over salt beef on rye, while motherly waitresses refilled their coffees.

Many dealers were orthodox Jews, and their particular frocked coats and hats, reminiscent of 18th-century Vienna, were commonplace sights on The Garden's streets. One elderly craftsman described The Garden in the mid-20th century: “Hatton Garden before the war was a Dickensian-looking place with a patchwork of rundown houses. There would be a setter in one room, a polisher in another, an engraver in another, and if you opened a door sometimes a rat would run out.”

There were no retail shops then – it was primarily a place of manufacture and the centre of the world's diamond trade. Other rooms had smelters used for melting down precious metals. Shops only started to emerge in the 1960s, and into this melting

pot came migrants from Eastern Europe, Italy, India and Ireland, as well as the indigenous working classes of the surrounding areas.

Despite its links to criminality, the main part of the Hatton Garden trade was legitimate, and the traders were represented by the Hatton Garden Association. Michael Hirsch, a buyer and seller of precious metals and an authority on gold trading, was a familiar figure in Hatton Garden for 30 years:

“When I first came to The Garden, the diamond dealers would do their business in the street, between 12pm and 2pm each day. But, of course, you can’t do that anymore. Business down here has always been based on trust. There is a Yiddish term, ‘muzel brocho’ – my word is my bond. If someone reneged on a deal, they could never trade down here again.

“Sometimes people try to fool you. Lead bars dipped in gold are a favourite. I can tell by the smell, the hardness and handling if something is not right. Early on my boss taught me: ‘First, don’t look at the gold, look at the person’s face.’ That’s advice that has served me well.

The ‘king’ and other villains

A trawl through old newspaper cuttings reveals many robberies in Hatton Garden or upon commuting traders, including the murder of Hatton Garden diamond merchant, Saul “Solly” Nahome in March 1998. He was shot outside his Golders Green home while carrying £250,000 in diamonds. The area was a particular target for burglars and safeblowers; in a three-month period during 1987, Hatton Garden suffered six robberies and 10 burglaries.

Over the years some dealers developed a symbiotic relationship with London’s criminals. Until his death in 1991, Moshe Riyb, a legendary middleman and “fence” was known as the King of Hatton Garden. Peter Finch, a customs officer, offered this description of Riyb’s unconventional working

methods in a 1992 interview with Esquire magazine: “Moshe would arrive on the street corner at 10.30 in the morning and wander round The Garden. He had cash to buy anything – legal or illegal. If you needed short-term funds he could provide it; the complete Mr Fixit. People beat a path to his door. He bought anything – proceeds of robberies, smuggled gold, old lady’s heirlooms ... When we raided him, we found nearly £2-million of stock in all forms of gold – including fine gold bars in his tiny office in Diamond House. Even the doorstep was a big lump of silver.”

Middlemen smelted stolen jewellery before passing it onto the big legitimate bul-

In a three-month period during 1987, Hatton Garden suffered six robberies and 10 burglaries



A Jewish trader in 2005 outside 88-90 Hatton Garden. Photo: Zorilla

lion dealers and laundering the proceeds. If caught handling stolen property, Garden traders would say they bought the haul “in good faith” – which was then an adequate response to avoid prosecution. Gold once smelted cannot be easily identified, and the same goes for precious gems when removed from a stolen piece of jewellery.

Another great attraction of Hatton Garden for criminals was its cash economy. In 1994, within hours of a burglary at St James’s Palace, a Hatton Garden jeweller paid £450

CASHING OUT



Holes bored through a half-metre thick concrete wall to access a vault in a safe deposit centre in Hatton Garden, London, where £14 million of diamonds and jewellery were stolen between April 2 and April 5, 2015.

Photo: Metropolitan Police

The ex-robbers quickly mastered gold smuggling before turning their new-found knowledge to cannabis and cocaine importation

for items belonging to Prince Charles worth £10,000. The jeweller contacted Scotland Yard after seeing pictures of the missing items in a newspaper.

But the police never took Hatton Garden seriously as a crime problem. They took the view that, when it came to financial crime, Hatton Garden was best left to HM Customs & Excise. As it was to turn out, this made sense.

By the late 1970s, villains were looking for new criminal avenues to escape the combined threats posed by the security industry, armed police officers and their informants. In the 1960s and 1970s, armed robbery was lucrative – all you needed was a fast car and four tough guys, each with a balaclava and a sawn-off shotgun, and you could rob a bank every day. But, by 1980, embarrassed Yard chiefs threw everything at the armed robbers, and the “blaggers,” as they were known, started getting shot in the act.

There had to be an easier and safer way to make a dishonest crust. And as it happened, there was. One of the first acts of Margaret Thatcher’s new government in 1979 was to

remove the Value Added Tax (VAT) on gold coins – including the South African kruggerand – while keeping VAT on gold scrap and raising the rate from 8% to 15%. This created a loophole that was to be exploited in one of the biggest frauds on the national revenue.

Crooks would buy large quantities of VAT-free kruggerands (or other gold coins) melt them down and cast them into gold scrap, which was then sold through secondary dealers before reaching the London market or gold jewellery manufacturers. This transaction would attract the 15 per cent VAT, with which the dealer, in league with the villains, would abscond. In 1982, then treasury minister John Wakeham told parliament that charges had been laid against 19 people for a total of about £40-million. But the VAT fraud is believed to have cost the excise man a great deal more – sources have estimated to us that the actual total was more like £500-million.

When, in 1982, the government re-imposed VAT on gold coins, the fraudster’s response was to smuggle in coins from countries where there was no or very little VAT payable. As many Hatton Garden dealers had experience in smuggling diamonds, they were able to explain to their new ex-bank robber partners the best ways to avoid border restrictions and controls, as well as providing accountants and solicitors who could help with the paperwork.

The ex-robbers quickly mastered gold smuggling before turning their new-found knowledge to cannabis and cocaine importation. Retrospectively, we can see that free-market policies on gold movement provided potential drug smugglers with a skills creation scheme.

Last of the old-school ‘blags’

By the early 1990s, most of London’s major criminals had moved into “Persian rugs” (drugs), and with tightening restrictions in the banking sector, and according to those who worked there, Hatton Garden’s economy, built on gold for cash, became crucial



It's likely that some of the robbery team may die in jail – their older ages have led some to nickname them the Grandpa Gang.

The Hatton Garden gang. Clockwise from top: Collins, Jones, Perkins, Doyle, Lincoln, and Wood.

as a drugs trade laundry.

For all that Hatton Garden has sought to clean up its image as a respectable centre for the jewellery trade, serious criminality – lured by the sparkle of gems and the serious money-changing hands – is never far away.

After the 2015 heist, police covertly recorded two of the gang, Terry Perkins and Danny Jones. Their conversation gives a flavour of the underbelly of villainy and violence that still haunts Hatton Garden. Jones relays to Perkins how an Islington crime figure was holding a man who owed him money and a local dealer was beaten up to encourage repayment:

“He owes £1.7-million pounds, he’s fucked a load of people out of diamonds and all that, they have got him, he went down to The Garden last week and smacked

a geezer up, in one of the shops.”

It’s likely that some of the robbery team may die in jail – their advanced ages have led some to nickname them the Grandpa Gang. But the Hatton Garden Heist is a reminder that, despite the vast sums of money to be gleaned from the drug trade, from people trafficking and of course from fraud, commercial burglary will never go entirely out of date. As legendary gangster Lucky Luciano explained: “Everybody has a little larceny in them,” particularly for professional criminals, the lure of life-changing wealth will always merit serious consideration. **CT**

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Where the aid money really goes . . .

Almost 80 per cent of humanitarian aid intended for Palestinians ends up in Israel's coffers, writes **Jonathan Cook**

Donors of aid to Palestine could be directly subsidising up to a third of the occupation's costs

Diplomats may have a reputation for greyness, obfuscation, even hypocrisy, but few have found themselves compared to a serial killer, let alone one who devours human flesh.

That honour befell Laars Faaborg-Andersen, the European Union's ambassador to Israel, a few weeks ago, when Jewish settlers launched a social media campaign casting him as Hannibal Lecter, the terrifying character from the film *Silence of the Lambs*. An image of the Danish diplomat wearing Lecter's prison face-mask was supposed to suggest that Europe needs similar muz-zling.

The settlers' grievance relates to European aid, which has provided temporary shelter to Palestinian Bedouin families after the Israeli army demolished their homes in the occupied territories near Jerusalem. The emergency housing has helped them remain on land coveted by Israel and the settlers.

European officials, outraged by the Lecter comparison, have reminded Tel Aviv that, were it to abide by international law, Israel – not the EU – would be taking responsibility for these families' welfare.

While Europe may think of

itself as part of an enlightened West, using aid to defend Palestinians' rights, the reality is less reassuring. The aid may actually be making things significantly worse

Shir Hever, an Israeli economist who has spent years piecing together the murky economics of the occupation, recently published a report that makes shocking reading. Like others, he believes international aid has allowed Israel to avoid footing the bill for its decades-old occupation. But he goes further. His astonishing conclusion – one that may surprise Israel's settlers – is that at least 78 per cent of humanitarian aid intended for Palestinians ends up in Israel's coffers.

The sums involved are huge. The Palestinians under occupation are among the most aid-dependent in the world, receiving more than \$2-billion from the international community each year. According to Hever, donors could be directly subsidising up to a third of the occupation's costs.

Plundered resources

Other forms of Israeli profiteering have been identified in previous studies.

In 2013, the World Bank very conservatively estimated that



HANNIBAL LECTER? No, it's Danish diplomat Laars Faaborg-Andersen, as depicted by an Israeli settler group.

the Palestinians lose at least \$3.40-billion a year in resources plundered by Israel. In addition, Israel's refusal to make peace with the Palestinians, and as a consequence the rest of the region, is used to justify Washington's annual \$3-billion in military aid.

Israel – the eighth most powerful country in the world – also uses the occupied territories as laboratories for testing weapons and surveillance systems on Palestinians – and then exports its expertise. Israel's military and cyber industries are hugely profitable, generating many billions of dollars of income each year. But whereas these income streams are a recognizable, if troubling, windfall from Israel's occupation, western humanitarian aid to the Palestinians is clearly intended for the victims, not the victors.

So how is Israel creaming off so much? The problem, says Hever, is Israel's self-imposed role as mediator. To reach the Palestinians, donors have no choice but to go through Israel. This provides ripe opportunities for what he terms "aid subversion" and "aid diversion."

The first results from the Palestinians being a captive market. They have access to few goods and services that are not Israeli.

Dairy monopoly

Who Profits?, an Israeli organisation monitoring the economic benefits for Israel in the occupation, assesses that dairy firm Tnuva enjoys a monopoly in the West Bank worth \$60 million annually. Aid diversion, meanwhile, occurs because Israel controls all movement of people and goods. Israeli restrictions mean it gets to charge for transportation and storage, and levy "security" fees.

Other studies have identified additional profits from "aid destruction." When Israel wrecks foreign-funded aid projects, Palestinians lose – but Israel often benefits. Cement-maker Neshet, for example, is reported to control 85 per cent of all construction by Israelis and Palestinians, including the

supplies for rebuilding efforts in Gaza after Israel's repeated rampages.

Significant segments of Israeli society, aside from those in the security industries, are lining their pockets from the occupation. Paradoxically, the label "the most aid-dependent people in the world" – usually affixed to the Palestinians – might be better used to describe Israelis.

What can be done? International law expert Richard Falk notes that Israel is exploiting an aid oversight vacuum: There are no requirements on donors to ensure their money reaches the intended recipients.

What the international community has done over the past 20 years of the Oslo process – inadvertently or otherwise – is offer Israel financial incentives to stabilize and entrench its rule over the Palestinians. It can do so relatively cost-free.

While Europe and Washington have tried to beat Israel with a small diplomatic stick to release its hold on the occupied territories, at the same time they dangle juicy financial carrots to encourage Israel to tighten its grip. However, there is a small ray of hope. Western aid policy does not have to be self-sabotaging. Hever's study indicates that Israel has grown as reliant on Palestinian aid as the Palestinians themselves.

The EU has noted that Israel, not Brussels, should be caring for the Bedouin it has left homeless. Europe could take its own advice to heart and start shifting the true costs of the occupation back on to Israel. That may happen soon enough whatever the West decides, if – as even Israel is predicting will occur soon – the Palestinian National Authority of Mahmoud Abbas collapses.

CT

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Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net

Aid diversion occurs because Israel controls all movement of people and goods. Israeli restrictions mean it gets to charge for transportation and storage, and levy "security" fees

King of chaos

As the US gears up for another presidential election, **Edward S. Herman** examines the record of Barack Obama and finds it less than liberal

If Iraq, Libya and Syria have been reduced to a chaotic state, Obama has a heavy responsibility for these developments, although Iraq's downward spiral is in large measure allocatable to the Bush-Cheney regime

Diana Johnstone recently published a very good book on Hillary Clinton entitled *Queen of Chaos* (Counterpunch Books, 2015). She justifies the title through her convincing critical examination of Clinton's performance as Secretary of State, as well as her broader record of opinions and actions.

But Clinton served under President Barack Obama, and the policies that she pushed while in office were of necessity approved by her superior, who worked with her in "a credible partnership" (Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, *From Bitter Campaign to Strong Alliance*: New York Times, March 19, 2010). And after Mrs. Clinton's exit from office, Mr. Obama carried on with replacement John Kerry in a largely similar and not very peaceable mode.

Most important was their 2014 escalation of hostilities toward Russia with the coup d'état in Kiev, anger at the responsive Russian absorption of Crimea, warfare in Eastern Ukraine, and US-sponsored sanctions against Russia for its alleged aggression.

There was also simmering tension over Syria, with US and client state support of rebels and jihadists attempting to overthrow the Assad government, and with Russia (and Iran and Hezbollah) backing Assad. There was also Obama's widening use of drone warfare and declared right

and intention to bomb any perceived threat to US national security anyplace on earth.

In any case, if Clinton was Queen of Chaos, Obama is surely King. If Iraq, Libya and Syria have been reduced to a chaotic state, Obama has a heavy responsibility for these developments, although Iraq's downward spiral is in large measure allocatable to the Bush-Cheney regime. The Syrian crisis has intensified, with Russia providing substantial air support that has turned the tide in favor of Assad and threatened collapse of the US-Saudi-Turkish campaign of regime change.

This remains a dangerous situation, with Turkey threatening more aggressive action and the Obama-Kerry team still unwilling to accept defeat (see Patrick Cockburn, *Syrian Civil War: Could Turkey be Gambling on an Invasion?* – Independent, Jan. 30, 2016). Yemen has also descended into chaos in the Obama years, and, although Saudi Arabia is the main direct villain in this case, the Obama administration provides much of the weaponry and diplomatic protection for this aggression. Indeed, for several years, it has done some drone bombing of Yemen on its own.

A fair amount of chaos also characterizes Israel-Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, along with many sub-Saharan



Caricature by DonkeyHotey/Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/donkeyhotey/6702630607>

Three states that were independent and considered enemy states by Israel and many US policy-makers and influentials – Iraq, Libya and Syria – have been turned into failed state

regimes, including Mali, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Burundi. The leadership of the superpower with long-standing predominant influence over this region must be given substantial (dis)credit for this widening chaotic state, which has produced the main body of refugees flooding into Europe and elsewhere, and the surge

of retail terrorism.

It is often alleged that this chaos reflects a terrible failure of US policy. This is debatable. Three states that were independent and considered enemy states by Israel and many US policy-makers and influentials – Iraq, Libya and Syria – have been turned into failed states and may be

COVER STORY

On April 6, 2010, Obama said the United States would “not develop new nuclear warheads or pursue new military missions or new capabilities for nuclear weapons.” But he wasted no time in violating these promises, embarking soon on a nuclear “modernization” program that involved the development of an array of nuclear weapons that made their use more thinkable

in the process of dismemberment. Libya had been ruled by a man, Muammar Gaddafi, who was the most important leader seeking an Africa free of western domination. He was chairman of the African Union in 2009, two years before his overthrow and murder. His exit led quickly to the advance of the United States African Command (Africom) and US-African state partnerships to combat terrorism – that is, to a major setback to African independence and progress. (See Maximilian Forte, *Slouching Toward Sirte – Baraka Books, 2012.*) The chaos in Ukraine and Syria has been a great windfall for the US beneficiaries of the permanent war system, for whom contracts are flowing and job advancement and security are on the upswing. For them, the King of Chaos has done well and his policies have been successful.

Arms race

There has been little publicity and debate addressing President Obama’s new and major contribution to the nuclear arms race and the threat of nuclear war. In April, 2009, he claimed, while in Prague, a “commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” And on the release of a Nuclear Posture Review on April 6, 2010, he stated that the United States would “not develop new nuclear warheads or pursue new military missions or new capabilities for nuclear weapons.” But he wasted no time in violating these promises, embarking soon on a nuclear “modernization” program that involved the development of an array of nuclear weapons that made their use more thinkable (smaller, more accurate, less lethal).

The New York Times reported that the “B61 Model 12, the bomb flight-tested in Nevada last year, is the first of five new warhead types planned as part of an atomic re-vitalization estimated to cost up to \$1-trillion over three decades. As a family, the weapons and their deliv-

ery systems move toward the small, the stealthy and the precise. Already there are hints of a new arms race. Russia called the B61 tests ‘irresponsible’ and ‘openly provocative.’ China is said to be especially worried about plans for a nuclear-tipped cruise missile.”

The Times does cite a number of US analysts who consider this enterprise dangerous, as well as unaffordable and unneeded, but the modernization plan has not aroused much comment or widespread concern. And it would very likely be considered too modest by all the leading Republican presidential candidates.

What is driving Obama to move in such an anti-social direction, perversely generating threats to national security and wasting vast resources that are urgently needed by the civil society? Obama is a weak president, operating in a political economy and political environment that even a strong president could not easily manage.

The military-industrial complex is much stronger now than it was in January, 1961, when Eisenhower, in his farewell speech, warned of its “acquisition of unwarranted influence,” and consequent threat to the national well-being. The steady stream of wars has entrenched it further, and the pro-Israel lobby and subservience of the mass media have further consolidated a permanent war system.

It is interesting to see that even Bernie Sanders doesn’t challenge the permanent war system, whose spiritual effects and ravenous demands would seem to make internal reform much more difficult. We may recall Thorstein Veblen’s more-than-a-century-old description of war-making in his book, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, as having an “unequivocal” regressive cultural value: “It makes for a conservative animus on the part of the population,” and during wartime “civil rights are in abeyance, and the more warfare and armament the more abeyance.

At the same time, war-making directs the popular interest to other, nobler, institutionally less hazardous matters than the unequal distribution of wealth or of creature comforts.”

With a permanent war system in place, the vetting of political candidates, and the budgetary and policy demands of the important institutions dominating the political economy, war-making and nourishing the Pentagon and other security state institutions become the highest priorities of top officials of the state. They all prepare for war on a steady basis and go to war readily, often in violation of international law and even domestic law. Subversion has long been global in scope (see Philip Agee’s *Inside the Company* and William Blum’s *Killing Hope*, for massive and compelling details). Reagan’s war on Nicaragua, Clinton’s attacks on Yugoslavia and Iraq, Bush-1’s wars on Panama and Iraq, Bush-2’s wars on Afghanistan, Iraq and a propagandistic War on Terror, and Obama’s wars on Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and many other places, show an impressive continuum and growth.

Obama’s Cuba and Iran policies deviate to some extent from his record of power projection by rule of force. In the case of Cuba, the opposition to recognition of the Cuban reality had diminished, and a growing body of businessmen, officials and pundits, and the international community, considered the non-recognition and sanctions an obsolete and somewhat discreditable hold-over from the past. It is likely that the new policy recognized the possibility of democracy promotion as a superior route to inducing changes in Cuba.

It should also be noted that the policy change thus far has not included a lifting of economic sanctions, even though for many years UN Assembly votes against those sanctions have been in the order of 191-2. A more immediate factor in the

changed policy course may have been the fact that several Latin American countries threatened to boycott the 2015 Organization of American States (OAS) Summit if Cuba was not admitted.

As Jane Franklin notes, “Obama had to make a choice. He could refuse to attend and therefore be totally isolated, or he could join in welcoming Cuba and be a statesman.” (Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the US Empire: A Chronological History* – Monthly Review Press, April 2016,) Obama chose to be a statesman.

In the case of Iran, the new Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, signed in Vienna on July 14, 2015, was hammered out in an environment in which Iran had long been made the villain that needed to be constrained. This followed years of demonizing and pressure on Iran to scale back its nuclear program, regularly claimed, without evidence, to be aiming at developing nuclear weapons. US hegemony is nowhere better displayed than in the fact that Iran was encouraged to develop a nuclear program when ruled by the Shah of Iran, a US-sponsored dictator, but has been under steady attack for any nuclear effort whatsoever since his replacement by a regime opposed by the United States, with the steady cooperation of the UN and “international community.”

Pressing for attack

Israel is a major regional rival of Iran, and having succeeded in getting the United States to turn lesser rivals, Iraq and Libya, into failed states, it has been extremely anxious to get the United States to do the same to Iran. Israel’s leaders have pulled out all the stops in getting its vast array of US politicians, pundits, intellectuals and lobbying groups to press for a US military assault on Iran. (See James Petras, “The Centrepiece of US Foreign Policy Struggle,” *Dissident Voice*, August 12, 2015.)

The tensions between the United States

With a permanent war system in place, the vetting of political candidates, and the budgetary and policy demands of the important institutions dominating the political economy, war-making and nourishing the Pentagon and other security state institutions become the highest priorities of top officials of the state

COVER STORY

Israel's leaders have pulled out all the stops in getting its vast array of US politicians, pundits, intellectuals and lobbying groups to press for a US military assault on Iran

and Iran have been high for years, with a sanctions war already in place. But with many military engagements in progress, tensions with Russia over Ukraine and Syria at a dangerous level, and perhaps resentment at the attempted political bullying by Israeli leaders, the Obama administration chose to negotiate with Iran rather than fight. The agreement finally arrived at with Iran calls for more intrusive inspections and some scaling down of Iran's nuclear program, while it frees Iran from some onerous sanctions and threats.

This was a rare moment of peace-making, and probably the finest moment in the years of the King's rule. Iran is still treated as a menace and in need of close

surveillance. But there was a slowing-down in the drift toward a new and larger war, allowing the Obama administration to focus more on warring in Iraq and Syria and taking on any other threat to US national security. **CT**

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BENDIB'S WORLD

Khalil Bendib



Working with the railroad

Dell Franklin makes new friends on the Southern Pacific run to LA

It was still dark when I got the call for a Southern Pacific run, which meant transporting brake men, conductors, and engineers all over the central coast of California, from Salinas down to Los Angeles – big bank, but no tips.

I showed up at the Amtrak station in San Luis Obispo at 5:30, where two SP employees with lunch pails and overnight bags climbed into the back seat. The third member was late, so we sat in the cold dawn for 15 minutes until a tall, raw-boned man with moustache and sideburns in his 30s showed up to take the shotgun seat.

I set off for their destination – Santa Barbara, via Guadalupe, a small produce centre full of Mexican migrants, near Santa Maria, 35 miles away. I kept the radio off, and nobody spoke for a while. Then the man

beside me began talking to the men in back, bitching about the long, erratic, hours of the job, the pay, and the demands on workers. Half asleep, the men in the back replied in monosyllables.

Then they began talking of the old days, when the railroad was bigger, and there were more employees, and there was more business. One guy said he didn't have enough money to build a rec room for his kids, who were active in sports. He bragged of their accomplishments. The other guy in the back

complained how spoiled his kids were; he hated their loud music, and had given up trying to discipline them, leaving it up to his wife to deal with their wayward behavior.

"If my boy gets outta line," the guy beside me said, "he pays dearly. I'm boss. Dottie knows that, so does Junior. He's captain of the football team. Gonna play high school next year."

They continued talking about their kids. Then Roy, the guy beside me, asked me, "Got any kids?"

"Nope."

"Married?"

"Nope. Only a cat."

"I hate cats." He sized me up. "What good are they? You can't train 'em. They aren't like dogs. A dog can herd sheep and cattle, go huntin', and learn to do tricks, if you

train 'em right. What can a cat do?"

"My cat does what he wants," I told him. "He shits where he wants, kills rats and mice. Swats me on the ankle when I don't feed him on time. He's an insubordinate wise ass. I love that cat."

"My dog Mac's a pit mix, and he'd eat that cat of yours in a second."

I laughed. "Popeye smacked a Doberman/Rottweiler mix on the snout the other morning, drew blood, sent him whimpering away with his tail between his legs. Popeye

"My cat does what he wants. He shits where he wants, kills rats and mice. Swats me on the ankle when I don't feed him on time. He's an insubordinate wise ass. I love that cat"



When we got up to leave and were halfway out of the door, I turned to see Roy snatch a couple of dollars off the pile of money left on the table, and I quickly went back, Vic right behind me, and asked what the fuck he thought he was doing

rules my neighbourhood. He's 15 pounds, heavyweight champion of our neighbourhood, like Muhammad Ali."

Roy's neck muscles corded. "I hate that fucking nigger. Fucking Muslim. He's nothin' but a draft dodger – too chickenshit to go to Veet Nam."

"You serve in 'Nam?"

"I was too young. But I woulda gone."

"I don't blame Ali for not going. He's my hero."

He clammed up.

When I pulled into the tiny depot in Guadalupe, Roy moved to the back seat while a new guy sat shotgun. We took off across flat celery and broccoli fields on a two-lane blacktop that would eventually find Highway 101 and Santa Barbara. I stood to bank well over \$100, and was feeling good and relaxed.

The new SP man in front was older, with a wire-brush moustache and a big, cracked, jovial face. Right off, he was friendly and wanted to talk, rare among SP men. He was still glowing over his family's vacation in Las Vegas, where he got a big discount, swam in a pool, and saw shows, while his wife hit the slots. The three in the back began comparing the deals they got on their vacations, which led to a discussion of money in general, and how other transportation industries were flourishing, while their's was dying. They discussed unions, and I told them of the chickenshit union I was ordered to join, which was essentially a slush fund for the corporate heads to play golf and buy prostitutes in Vegas.

Vic, the guy beside me, said, "Makes yah sick, huh? Could be you rompin' with them beautiful high-class call girls."

I glanced at the audience in the back and told Vic about my great time at the Tommy Hearns-Sugar Ray Leonard championship fight at Caesar's Palace, where I bet on Leonard, won \$500, and bedded down a beauty for \$150. Vic slapped my knee in appreciation and exercised a booming laugh. "Damn," he said, "I miss my bachelor days,

but I gave it a good run before I got hitched. No regrets. I got plenty."

Vic and I exchanged embellished tales of the past. The guys in the back grew quieter, and grimmer, while Roy became downright morose.

Vic and I were fast becoming friends by the time we pulled into the depot in Santa Barbara, to meet a train from San Diego, from which I had to pick up two more railmen. We had an hour to wait, so decided to catch breakfast at a coffee shop down the street. The five of us found a big table and ordered quickly, except for Roy, who took time explaining to the middle-aged waitress that he wanted scrambled eggs that weren't runny, and bacon that was neither burned nor greasy.

When our plates came, Roy was peeved that his instructions had been ignored, and sent back his bacon, while the rest of us dug into our breakfasts. When his bacon finally arrived, he bitched about how he never ate out because nobody could get it right, which is why he'd trained his wife to cook things exactly to his specifications.

When the bill came, Roy insisted on separate tabs, but Vic and I grabbed the bill, worked out our share and donated bills, both chipping in a few extra bucks to sweeten the old gal's tip. Roy and the other two looked constipated, not wishing to leave much. When we were halfway out of the door, I turned to see Roy snatch a couple of dollars off the pile of money we'd left on the table, and I quickly returned, Vic behind me, and asked what he thought he was doing. He said the food and the service sucked; I yelled at him that he hadn't actually left a tip, as people watched up from the surrounding tables. I snatched two dollar bills from his hand and tossed them back onto the table. Roy started to make a move on me with his fists doubled; I had my fists cocked when Vic, with his massive forearms, stepped between us, followed by the other two SP guys. Roy was led out of

the coffee shop, while Vic calmly told me to cool off, telling me that Roy was an asshole, and I shouldn't let him get my goat.

That was the last I saw of Roy and the others, but I was still grinding my teeth and pumped with wrathful adrenaline when the two new SP passengers piled into my cab – a young lanky guy in the back, an older man wearing wireless glasses beside me. As we headed south along the 101 freeway, the shotgun man turned toward me, studying me.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

I took a deep breath. “Yeah. I'm okay, thanks.”

“You seem . . . troubled . . . you seem . . . disturbed.”

I noticed a bible in his lap. I exhaled a gush of air. “Disturbed?” I nodded. “You know a fellow employee, tall rangy guy named Roy?”

“Oh yes. I know Roy. A fine Christian gentleman.”

“I want to beat the living dogshit out of him. I normally don't have such violent intentions.”

He nodded, continued studying me. “You are a drinker and a carouser, are you not?”

I was startled at his acute observation. “I've done it all – alcohol, drugs, orgies, gambling, every vice known to man.”

Still facing me, his eyes held a distant, satisfied look. “What's your name?”

“Dell.”

“I'm Lloyd Addison. Dell, I was once like you. I cheated on my wife, carried on an affair with my best friend's wife. I tried to sleep with everybody's wife. I was selfish, a user, a taker, an evil man. I abused my family. I was terrible to everybody – a liar, a cheat. Then I found Jesus Christ. Five years ago. I am a happy man, at peace with myself for the first time. I refrained from all evil vices and evil thoughts. I no longer live for myself and my own gratification; I live for my family and fellow man through Jesus Christ, my saviour. I am dedicated to his cause in what

time I have left on this earth.”

“I doubt you or Jesus can help me,” I responded. “I see no way out, and might as well go down in flames.”

“You are still one of Jesus's children.”

“Not true. I'm the son of Murray and Rose Franklin.”

He handed me a card. He was minister at a church in Atascadero, where there are 30 churches to every bar, and all the kids in school are basket cases – in to weed and booze, with tattoos and rings in their noses.

“Dell, you come to my church this Sunday. I guarantee you will meet the right people and find the righteous path. You will be surrounded by good, wholesome, happy, caring people who will support you. You are so unhappy. I spotted it right off. It breaks my heart to see somebody so full of anger and guilt, so tormented by taking the wrong path. We can put you on the right path, the good path.”

I glanced into my rear view mirror, to see the lanky dude yawning as Lloyd told me of a rehab program run by his church. Then Lloyd opened his bible and began quoting passages he felt would allow me to come to my senses. We were well out of Santa Barbara and cruising along the isolated road, when I asked, “Hey, Lloyd, you think Jesus ate pussy?”

The dude in the back became unglued, writhing around as he roared with laughter. “Oh, yes!” he said.

The look of benevolent serenity disappeared from Lloyd's face, and his eyes became so inflamed and menacing behind his glasses that I feared he might hit me. He pounded the dashboard. “YOU!” he growled. “You will face eternal damnation! You will burn in hell!”

I nodded. “I know that, Lloyd. It's not gonna be fun, but I've had a lot of fun here.”

Hyperventilating, he clutched his bible, closing his eyes to gather himself. The guy in the back was still chortling. Lloyd finally turned away from me, staring straight

The look of benevolent serenity disappeared from Lloyd's face and his eyes became inflamed and menacing behind his glasses. I feared he might hit me. He pounded the dashboard

ON THE ROAD

About a mile out of Lompoc, Lloyd closed his bible and turned to me. “Jesus does love you. He forgives your sins”

ahead as we found the road to Lompac, our destination, 26 more miles away. As the discomfort lingered in the air, I spoke.

“Forgive me, Lloyd. I’ve been an asshole. I do respect how you’ve come to your present state. If it works for you, and you are doing good, I’m all for you no longer being a menace to your fellow man.”

He nodded, still clutching his bible.

“I know there’s good in everybody,” I continued, “even me. I’m good to my cat, even if I don’t know how to treat women, and they always leave me for being self-centred and uncommitted. At this point I need a good dog to go with my cat – if he’ll allow it. He’s pretty cantankerous.”

Lloyd calmed down. He glanced at me, nodded. Relieved, I drove on. The guy in the back yawned again. About a mile out of

Lompoc, Lloyd closed his bible and turned to me. “Jesus does love you,” he said. “He forgives your sins.”

“Thank you, Lloyd, I know you’re right.”

We pulled into the motel where they were to stay. I got their bags and placed them at their feet. Lloyd stood before me. “I’m counting on you to come to church this Sunday morning, Dell,” he said, very earnest.

“If I’m not too hung-over, Lloyd.”

Surprisingly, he hugged me, and I hugged him back, like good friends. All was well. **CT**

Dell Franklin is a long-time journalist and founder of the Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at www.dellfranklin.com

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Lovable dingbat or hateful warmonger?

To mark the death of his wife, Nancy, **Elizabeth Schulte** looks back at the reign of Ronald Reagan, the godfather of Republican party fanaticism

“**S**he was always more than the sum of her adoring gaze, that dazzling look she fixed on her husband like a pair of high beam headlights,” reported Politico. “She was the first and last voice in the ear of the leader of the free world, the trusted adviser who did the worrying and scheming for both of them. It’s just possible that without her, Ronald Reagan would never have become the 40th president of the United States.”

The tributes to former first lady Nancy Reagan flooded in from every media outlet and every corner of the political spectrum, even the darkest. George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Jimmy Carter, Benjamin Netanyahu – all had something nice to say about the Reagan legacy.

But if any of them were honest, they would be recalling the years that Nancy Reagan stood by the man responsible for untold death and misery – from his administration’s all-out assault on programs for the poor, to support for right-wing death squads in Latin America, from bringing the world to the precipice of nuclear Armageddon, to allowing the AIDS epidemic to kill thousands of gay men without a word.

You wouldn’t know any of that from opening up a newspaper following Nancy Reagan’s death. A war criminal has been transformed into a respectable elder



Illustration: Tony Jenkins – www.jenkinsdraw.com

REMEMBERING RONNIE

Reagan's victimization of the poor and casual racism was just as vicious as anything Donald Trump has dished out

statesman – a couple who were filled with narrow-minded bigotry are now portrayed as a sweet elderly couple who never meant any harm.

For her part, Nancy Reagan is probably best remembered for wild spending on designer dresses and bric-a-brac that she decided was necessary to lift the White House into a symbol of opulence and power befitting the most powerful household in the world. She raised \$822,000 from private contributors to give the White House the Hollywood star treatment. One contributor gave Nancy \$200,000 just for a set of presidential china.

That pursuit of excess was then, and is now, a symbol of what the Reagan administration actually represented, beyond the myth – the historic centralization of wealth and power, and a long, sickening party for the rich.

Besides the White House makeover, Nancy's other pet project during the 1980s was the Reagan administration's failed campaign against drug and alcohol abuse. Using the catchphrase "Just Say No," it combined simplistic moralizing with draconian criminal justice policies that blamed the victims of drug abuse and persecuted them to the fullest extent of the law.

But the issue that revealed the true character of Nancy Reagan was the AIDS crisis. While thousands of people, the vast majority of them gay men, contracted the then-mysterious disease, the Reagan administration refused to even acknowledge its existence, much less take any steps toward solving the crisis.

Nancy maintained that gross negligence into her personal life. When actor Rock Hudson, who was in the desperate last stages of dying of AIDS, reached out to his friends, the Reagans, to help get him a spot in a French hospital that might have saved his life, they ignored him. "She did not feel this was something the White House should get into," Reagan staffer

Mark Weinberg said of Nancy.

That about sums up the Reagans' storybook romance. They were a hateful couple, full of prejudice, who let nothing come in the way of their warped vision of America, where the rich and powerful were celebrated and promoted at the expense of everyone else.

Today, with the Republican Party tottering under the weight of a presidential primary race where billionaire wing-nut bigot Donald Trump is still leading the way, there's a lot of talk about the "real" Republican Party. Is it the party of off-the-leash bigots like Trump or of good ol' Ronald Reagan?

The answer, of course, is both. Reagan's victimization of the poor and casual racism was just as vicious as anything Trump has dished out. While his policies can seem, at first glance, to be moderate by comparison with today's GOP, that's the result of the political mainstream being relentlessly dragged to the right over the past 30 years – and Reagan deserves a lot of the credit for getting the ball rolling. Here a few of the Reagan administration's "accomplishments" during its time in office in the 1980s:

- Reverse the gains of the 1960s and 1970s: The Reagan Revolution represented, above all else, a rejection of the legacy of the 1960s and '70s social movements and an effort to turn back the clock: for women, blacks, Latinos, workers – basically everyone except corporate America.

After serving as president of the Screen Actors Guild, and even being a Democrat in the 1940s, Reagan decided to throw his support behind the anti-Communist witch hunt of the 1950s and of the era of New Deal liberalism that came before.

During May, 1969, protests by students in Berkeley, California, the heart of the movement against the Vietnam War, then-California Gov. Reagan ordered the police to "use whatever method they choose against the protestors." Dozens of students

were injured when police fired into the crowd, in what came to be called “Bloody Thursday.” At a press conference afterward, Reagan chastised the very students who had been attacked.

The election of Reagan as president in 1980 represented a turning point for the US ruling class. It was a rejection of social reform and a vilification of the people who benefited from them – and the beginning of unfettered prosperity for corporate America and for its real priorities for the US government, namely an expanded military.

- The myth of the “welfare queen” – all bigots need a scapegoat, and during Reagan’s failed campaign in 1976 to win the Republican presidential nomination, his was the image of a woman bilking the government via welfare.

“In Chicago, they found a woman who holds the record,” Reagan declared at a campaign rally in January 1976. “She used 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans’ benefits for four nonexistent deceased veteran husbands, as well as welfare. Her tax-free cash income alone has been running \$150,000 a year.”

Reagan’s message was also that she was black, though he didn’t state it outright – this, after all, was the era after the civil rights movement.

Like other politicians of the time, Reagan used coded racist language to create a scapegoat who could be blamed for the economic crisis that developed through the late 1970s, including high unemployment and an energy crisis that forced drivers to wait in long lines for gas. Reagan had an answer, too: begin cutting away at social spending.

And it succeeded. During his administration, Reagan shrank social spending, not just for welfare, but other anti-poverty programs like food stamps and Social Security disability benefits. The money that had been “wasted” on underserving poor

people could now be funneled to the “deserving” – through tax breaks for the rich and more spending on the Pentagon.

- Racism, racism, racism: Racism and scapegoating were necessary ingredients of Reagan Revolution. With the goal of peeling away racist white voters from the Democratic Party in the South, the Reagan pandered to bigotry from the very start.

Advised by a local official who told the Republican National Committee that this was the place to appeal to “George Wallace-inclined voters,” Reagan launched his 1980s presidential campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the town where civil rights volunteers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were abducted and murdered 16 years earlier.

During the campaign, Reagan criticized the food stamp program for helping “some strapping young buck ahead of you to buy a T-bone steak” while “you were waiting in line to buy hamburger.” Later, according to Ian Haney Lopez’s Dog Whistle Politics, Reagan’s handlers changed “strapping young buck” to “young fellow” because the phrase was too racially charged even for them.

As president, Reagan launched his version of the “war on drugs” in 1982 – a policy that has been an unmitigated disaster for black America. As Michelle Alexander points out, at that time, drug crime was declining, not rising. From the outset, the war had little to do with drug crime and nearly everything to do with racial politics. The drug war was part of a grand and highly successful Republican Party strategy of using racially coded political appeals on issues of crime and welfare to attract poor and working-class white voters who were resentful of, and threatened by desegregation, busing and affirmative action. In the words of H.R. Haldeman, President Richard Nixon’s White House chief of staff: “[The whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.”

The money that had been “wasted” on underserving poor people could now be funneled to the “deserving” – through tax breaks for the rich and more spending on the Pentagon

REMEMBERING RONNIE

The Reagan administration backed military dictators in El Salvador and Guatemala, but its most high-profile intervention was in Nicaragua, where the left-wing Sandinistas had come to power after a mass struggle and armed conflict

Here was another “achievement” of the Reagan years: Anti-drug, tough-on-crime policies disproportionately targeted black people for arrest, and gave them the harshest sentences – out of all relationship to the crime.

- A four-star general in a one-sided class war: In Reagan’s America, the priority was corporate profits, no matter what the cost to workers’ living standards. According to Reagan’s trickle-down economics, the rich would be freed from taxes and regulations to do what they do best – make money – and the wealth would trickle down to the rest of us.

The theory half-worked. The wealthy enjoyed tax cuts, and corporations were freed from regulations. The top tax rate for the highest-income households dropped from about 70 percent to just 28 percent.

As for the US working class, Reaganomics led to factory closures and unemployment rates that reached Depression-era levels for blue-collar workers. Meanwhile, the social safety net was being destroyed – at exactly the time when workers and their families needed it the most.

On the chopping block, too, were workers’ organizations. One of Reagan’s first acts as president was to implement a plan put in place by the Carter administration – and fire 11,000 striking air traffic controllers in 1981. The assault on workers and their unions continued from there.

- His finger on the nuclear switch: While government spending for social programs went into free fall, spending on the military headed in the opposite direction. Pentagon spending would reach an estimated \$34 million an hour during the Reagan administration.

Central to Reagan’s foreign policy rhetoric, which talked about returning the US military to its heyday before the defeat in Vietnam, was the “evil empire” – the Soviet Union. Whipping up hysteria about the dangers of Communism, Ronnie Raygun, as he was called, poured money into the

Pentagon, including outlandish programs like “Star Wars,” where the US was supposed to have missiles that would shoot down other missiles.

On at least one occasion in 1983, the administration came close to nuclear war with the Soviet Union, according to declassified documents published by the National Security Archive and reported in the Atlantic. After the USSR invaded Afghanistan, the CIA provided money and weapons to an opposition that included Osama bin Laden. The networks that would later become al-Qaeda came into being there – but Reagan called them “freedom fighters.”

- Crushing revolutions and funding death squads: The Reagan rap sheet of international war crimes extends around the world, including support for the racist apartheid regime in South Africa. But the administration focused much of its attention on the US “backyard” – Central America.

The Reagan administration backed military dictators in El Salvador and Guatemala, but its most high-profile intervention was in Nicaragua, where the left-wing Sandinistas had come to power after a mass struggle and armed conflict that overthrew the dictator Somoza.

The response of the US – after some years of disorientation and indecision – was to organize an army of counter-revolutionaries. The contras would wage a guerrilla war against the Sandinistas.

Reports of contra human rights abuses forced the US to cut off official aid, but that didn’t stop US operatives from making a secret arrangement, where the US supplied weapons and supplies to Iran, in exchange for funds that would eventually fund the contras. Iran, supposedly the US government’s arch-enemy, agreed to help get US hostages released in Lebanon.

When the whole arms-for-hostages scandal, or Conragate, was uncovered, a few players were exposed, such as Lt. Col. Oliver North. But Reagan denied any

REMEMBERING RONNIE

knowledge of the deal, and he got away with it, along with the inner circle of his administration.

In 1996, in a series called Dark Alliance, journalist Gary Webb revealed the US government's connection with the Contras and the illegal cocaine trade. In other words, Reagan's crimes had come full circle – from a secret war on the Sandinistas, to hypocrisy with Iran, to the lie of a “drug war” on the streets of America.

The people behind Reagan's foreign policy would haunt us for decades. Paul Wolfowitz, John Negroponte, Elliot Abrams, John Poindexter and Richard Perle – the hawks responsible for the war in Iraq in the new century – all served Reagan first.

● Sentencing people to death during the HIV/AIDS crisis: Thousands of people died as a result of the AIDS epidemic in the first six years of the Reagan administration, but the president refused to say even a word about it. The slogan of AIDS activists at the time summed it up: “Silence = Death.”

From the start, it was obvious that a national health emergency was in the making, but because the victims were gay men, little was done by the Reagan administration. Instead, the sufferers were vilified

and scapegoated. For example, Reagan's communications director, right-wing fanatic and Holocaust denier Pat Buchanan, argued that AIDS is “nature's revenge on gay men.”

“The sexual revolution has begun to devour its children. And among the revolutionary vanguard, as gay rights activists, the morality rate is highest and climbing . . . The poor homosexuals – they have declared war upon nature, and now nature is exacting an awful retribution,” Buchanan wrote in a 1983 op-ed for the New York Post.

By the time Reagan said anything about the epidemic in 1987, 36,058 people in the US had been diagnosed with AIDS, and 20,849 were dead. There were more than 50,000 cases around the world.

This is real Reagan legacy. So if Donald Trump wants to pick up the mantle, he's already part way there. And if Democrats like Obama want to find common cause with it, then they're revealing which side they're really on. **CT**

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Elizabeth Schulte is a contributor to Socialist Worker, at whose web site – www.socialistworker.org – this article was first published./

By the time Reagan said anything about the epidemic in 1987, 36,058 people in the US had been diagnosed with AIDS, and 20,849 were dead



Journalist, Filmmaker, Author, Activist, Father, Brother, Friend, Troublemaker, News Dissector

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IN THE PICTURE



Photo: Helder Ribeiro

Cash for nukes, not for welfare?

London demonstration slams government plans to spend billions on machines of war, while imposing poverty on its people

There's something obscene about a society in which the ruling elite considers it sensible to lavish billions on weapons of mass destruction while, simultaneously, imposing swingeing cuts to services and assistance for the destitute and unemployed, and while 28 per cent of the nation's children are living in poverty.

That was the key message of a mass demonstration, organized



Photo: Ron Fassbender

IN THE PICTURE

Photo: Garry Knight



Photo: Helder Ribeiro



Photo: Helder Ribeiro



IN THE PICTURE



Photo: Helder Ribeiro

by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) that saw 60,000 people marching through London on February 27, in the biggest anti-nuke demonstration in a generation, angered by plans to replace Britain's ageing fleet of Trident nuclear submarines.

The feeling of the crowd was summed up by Kai Carrwright, 17, from Exeter, who told the Guardian: "We are having to pay to go to university and yet they want to spend £100-billion on something that can only lead to the destruction of life on Earth."

Keynote speakers at the Trafalgar Square climax to the march were the Labour Party leader of the opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, who told the demonstrators, "If elected I would replace Trident not with a generation of nuclear weapons, but with jobs," and Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru leaders Nicola Sturgeon and Leanne Wood. There was no sign of Prime Minister David Cameron, of course, apart from a few non-flattering effigies. — **Tony Sutton**



Photo: Ron Fassbender

IN THE PICTURE

Photo: Gary Knight



Photo: Ron Fassbender



Photo: Gary Knight

IN THE PICTURE

Photo: Ron Fassbender



The photographers

The photographers featured are based in London.

Ron Fassbender's Flickr feed is www.flickr.com/theweeklybull

Helder Ribeiro's Flickr feed is www.flickr.com/photos/photo_hr

Garry Knight's Flickr feed is www.flickr.com/photos/garryknight

Photo: Ron Fassbender



Photo: Garry Knight



Photo: Helder Ribeiro



Photo: Ron Fassbender



Keynote speakers, Jeremy Corbyn (top) and the SNP's Nicola Sturgeon (left) PM David Cameron sent a friend (above) . . .

Hillary Clinton and a death in Honduras

Berta Cáceres knew she was likely to die at the hands of a brutal regime helped to power by the United States, writes **David Edwards**

“The army has an assassination list of 18 human rights fighters with my name at the top. I want to live, there are many things I still want to do in this world. I take precautions, but in the end, in this country, where there is total impunity, I am vulnerable. When they want to kill me, they will do it”

On February 28, Hillary Clinton told an audience from the pulpit of a Memphis church: “We need more love and kindness in America.” This was something she felt “from the bottom of my heart.” These benevolent sentiments recalled the “national purpose” identified by President George H.W. Bush in his inaugural address in 1989, shortly before he flattened Iraq. It was, he said, “to make kinder the face of the nation and gentler the face of the world.”

Clinton, of course, meant North America, specifically the United States. But other places in America are short on love and kindness, too. Consider Honduras, for example.

On June 28, 2009, the Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was kidnapped by masked soldiers and forced into exile. Since the ousting, according to the New York Times, the country “has been descending deeper into a human rights and security abyss” as the military coup “threw open the doors to a huge increase in drug trafficking and violence, and . . . unleashed a continuing wave of state-sponsored repression.” In 2012, Honduras had a murder rate of 90.4 per 100,000 population, then the highest rate in the world. In 2006, three years before the coup, the murder rate had stood at 46.2 per 100,000.

The years since 2009 had seen, says the citation for last year’s Goldman Environmental Prize “an explosive growth in environmentally destructive megaprojects that

would displace indigenous communities. Almost 30 per cent of the country’s land was earmarked for mining concessions, creating a demand for cheap energy to power future mining operations. To meet this need, the government approved hundreds of dam projects around the country, privatizing rivers and land, and uprooting communities.” In 2015, Global Witness reported that Honduras was “the most dangerous country [in which] to be an environmental defender.”

Berta Cáceres, a mother of four, was co-founder and general coordinator of the COPINH (Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras) group opposing this state-corporate exploitation. Last year, she was awarded the Goldman prize, the world’s top award for grassroots environmental activists, for work opposing a major dam project. Many of COPINH’s leaders have been murdered in recent years. In 2013, Cáceres said: “The army has an assassination list of 18 human rights fighters with my name at the top. I want to live, there are many things I still want to do in this world. I take precautions, but in the end, in this country, where there is total impunity, I am vulnerable. When they want to kill me, they will do it.”

On the night of March 3, armed men burst through the back door of Cáceres’s house and shot her four times, killing her in her bed. Adan Johnson, an associate editor at Alter-

net, commented at the US media-watch site Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR): “There was widespread outcry and grief over her death, and the story was covered by major media in the United States. But there was a glaring problem with the coverage: Almost none of it mentioned that the brutal regime that likely killed Cáceres came to power in a 2009 coup d’état supported by the United States, under President Barack Obama and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.”

Confidential - the embassy perspective

Following the 2009 coup, the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the European Union all condemned Zelaya’s removal as a military coup. A confidential US embassy cable, later published by Wikileaks, commented: “The embassy perspective is that there is no doubt that the military, supreme court and National Congress conspired on June 28 in what constituted an illegal and unconstitutional coup against the executive branch. . . . There is equally no doubt from our perspective that Roberto Micheletti’s assumption of power was illegitimate.”

That was behind closed doors. In public, 15 US House Democrats urged the US regime to “fully acknowledge that a military coup has taken place and . . . follow through with the total suspension of non-humanitarian aid, as required by law.” Writing for the Common Dreams website, Alexander Main supplied some detail: “Ann-Marie Slaughter, then director of policy planning at the State Department, sent an email to [Secretary of State] Clinton on August 16 [2009] strongly urging her to ‘take bold action’ and to ‘find that [the] coup was a ‘military coup’ under US law;’ a move that would have immediately triggered the suspension of all non-humanitarian U.S. assistance to Honduras.”

Hillary Clinton’s State Department refused, thus implicitly recognising the military takeover. As FAIR noted, Clinton makes clear in her memoirs that she had no intention of restoring President Zelaya to power: “In the subsequent days [after the coup]

I spoke with my counterparts around the hemisphere, including Secretary Espinosa in Mexico. We strategized on a plan to restore order in Honduras and ensure that free and fair elections could be held quickly and legitimately, which would render the question of Zelaya moot.”

In September 2009, US State Department officials blocked the OAS from adopting a resolution that would have rejected the legitimacy of Honduran elections carried out under the dictatorship, thus giving the coup the final US seal of approval.

the ousted former president, Zelaya, said last year: “Secretary Clinton had many contacts with us. She is a very capable woman, intelligent, but she is very weak in the face of pressures from groups that hold power in the United States, the most extremist right-wing sectors of the US government, known as the hawks of Washington. She bowed to those pressures. And that led US policy to Honduras to be ambiguous and mistaken.”

Zelaya added: “President Obama has not wanted to hear our peoples. He has turned a deaf ear on the cry of the people. First we protested in the opposition. A few months ago, they physically removed me from the congress, the National Congress, because our party mounted a peaceful protest. The military removed us, using tear gas in the congress. They expelled us, beating us with batons, beating us into the street. This is the government that President Obama supports, a government that is repressive, a government that violates human rights, as has been shown by the very Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States. It has shown this to be the case.”

Main concluded: “A careful reading of the Clinton emails and Wikileaks US diplomatic cables from the beginning of her tenure, expose a Latin America policy that is often guided by efforts to isolate and remove left-wing governments in the region.” This assertion is supported by the increase in US military assistance to Honduras even as state-corporate violence has massively escalated.

US State Department officials blocked the OAS from adopting a resolution that would have rejected the legitimacy of Honduran elections carried out under the dictatorship, thus giving the coup the final US seal of approval

The Independent newspaper's Phil Davison was not able to bring himself to mention that the tyranny in Honduras is today being backed by the region's great superpower

Noam Chomsky explained the logic: "Zelaya was moving somewhat tentatively towards the kinds of social reforms that the United States has always opposed and will try to stop if it can."

A local matter - the media response

Corporate politics and media never tire of proclaiming the West's "responsibility to protect" in places such as Iraq, Libya and Syria. So how did these same humanitarians respond to the murder of a compassionate, respected and awesomely courageous activist in Honduras? FAIR commented on the overwhelming evidence of US support for the coup: "One wouldn't know any of this reading US reports of Cáceres' death. The coup, and its subsequent purging of environmental, LGBT and indigenous activists, is treated as an entirely local matter. . . . The Washington Post, Guardian, NBC, CNN and NPR didn't mention the 2009 coup that brought to power Cáceres' likely murderers, let alone the US's tacit involvement in the coup."

On the day FAIR's report was published, the first and only reference to these hidden truths in the UK press, recorded by the Nexis media database, was supplied by Jonathan Watts in the Guardian: "Washington's role is also controversial because the US backed the current government, which took power after a 2009 coup that ousted the democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya. The US is now providing fund [sic] for the Honduran police force."

Watts quoted International Rivers, an NGO that worked with Cáceres: "We must note that during the 2009 military coup in Honduras, the US government, with Hillary Clinton as secretary of state, worked behind the scenes to keep Honduras' elected government from being reinstated. Additionally, the US government continues to fund the Honduran military, despite the sharp rise in the homicide rate, political repression, and the murders of political opposition and peasant activists."

While hardly exhaustive, this is the only

mention of these issues I have found in the UK corporate press. A more recent piece by the Guardian's Washington correspondent, David Smith, mentioned the coup, but not US involvement. With touching naivety, Smith observed that "the US, determined to stop the flow of illegal immigrants from Central America, has been pouring money into Honduras's security apparatus."

The Times – so vocal in promoting western intervention to protect human rights, printed 68 words on the killing, penned by the Associated Press. The Telegraph gave the story a single mention. In the Independent, Phil Davison wrote of Cáceres: "As if anyone needed reminding, her murder brought back to Honduras the dark days of the 1980s Central American guerrilla wars, in which they and their neighbours fought to rid themselves of dictators backed by the US."

But in stark contrast to the courage of Cáceres and so many others in Honduras, Davison was not able to bring himself to mention that the tyranny in Honduras is today being backed by the region's great superpower. Also in the Independent, Caroline Mortimer made no mention of US complicity in the coup. Nor, unsurprisingly, did the BBC in two pieces on the killing.

As ever, 'mainstream' 'compassion' turns out to be rooted in rather more 'pragmatic' concerns. If an official enemy had been responsible for Cáceres's death, the cries of outrage, horror and denunciation would have blazed from corporate front pages and TV screens. Action would have been demanded, perhaps even 'intervention'. But when the horror is committed by a faithfully corrupt and brutal servant of empire aided and abetted by the "leader of the free world," none of the buttons on the vast, high-tech propaganda machine are pressed, and the story is quickly buried along with the victim.

Needless to say, awareness of the kind offered here threatens to jam a spanner in the conditionally 'compassionate' propaganda waterworks and must be scrupulously ignored or, at best, ridiculed. **CT**

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David Edwards
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media watchdog -
www.medialens.org

Why are the Russians so aggressive?

A poem by **Philip Kraske**

I was taking vodka shots with friend Vlad the other day,
When he thundered out a shock and said I had to pay.
"What on earth is this?" I said. "You always get the tab.
You just received a sparkling hour of my fine gift of gab."
Vlad returned he'd paid enough, he'd make no more
concession,
And thus began a classic bout of so-Russian aggression.

Which says it all about the Russkies: just no gratitude,
We take East Europe off their hands, and they give attitude.
We overturn a crappy prez, and lend Kiev esteem,
Making jealous Mr. Poot, who sends Crimea a team.
"What the heck's his beef?" we ask. "That we would steal his base?"
Far be it from us – that's nuts – that was ne'er the case.

We let them do constructive stuff and help us bomb Islamic,
And in return they whack our friends, which we find not so
comic.
Any jerk can tell the diff between moderate and thug:

The former have cool three-day beards, the latter bushy mug.
And then they go and say we're lax and bomb convoys to Turk,
Which we had just not seen before, or we'd have done the work.

Now they get all huffy saying, "A new Cold War's a-brew!"
Adding we're behind the scam and hoping them to screw.
Yet we've done but troop retreats, hot-waxing a few nukes,
Placing darts on Polish soil that target Iran kooks.
The new war games serve nothing but to calm the Slav
persuasion,
Make them feel like real adults; do you call that invasion?

But that's the way the Russians are: All is provocation.
The fact they've been invaded thrice – that's their explanation.
Me, I'd call it sloppy work and remind them times have
changed,
Napoleon and Adolf H were two bad guys deranged.
Now our leader's Mr. O, gots game from head to feet:
All we want is peace and prosp' – and phones to send a tweet.

*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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