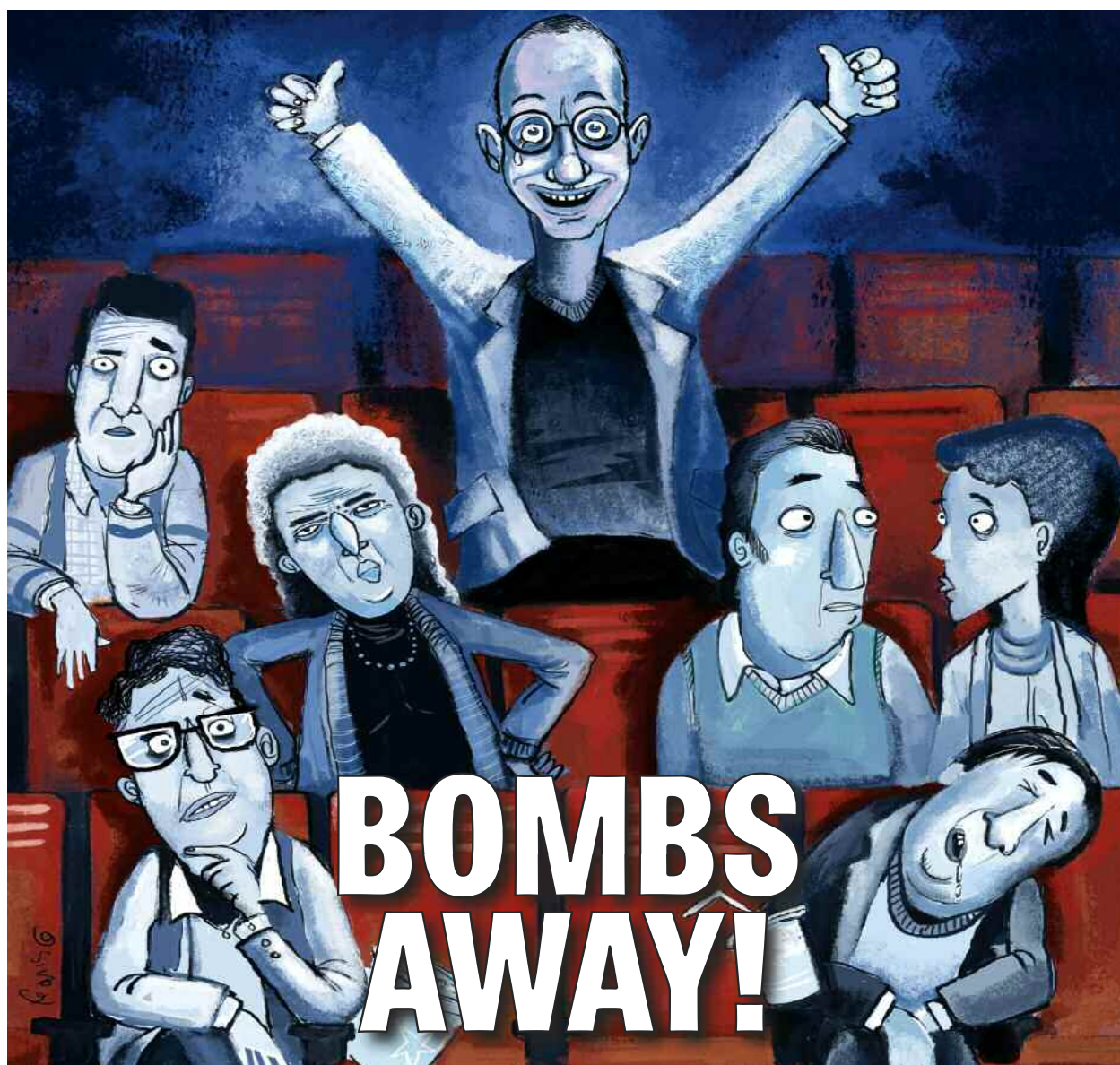


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The ^{ColdType} **READER**

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 12 ● MARCH 2007



MARK FEARING

THE MOVIES EVERYONE HATED – EXCEPT KENT WILLIAMS » PAGE 31

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WHO'LL STOP THE WAR?

BY MICHAEL I. NIMAN

The name Vietnam is back in our vocabulary, as we seem to be developing an interest in history – or at least in the history of wars that just would not end. The problem is that when we ignore history, we're condemned to repeat it.

The unfortunate reality is that people aren't suddenly interested in Vietnam because, like Iraq, it's a war we had no legitimate reason for entering. No. If that were the issue, Vietnam would have returned more strongly to the national zeitgeist back in 2002 as the Bush administration and the national media were beating the drums for war. The reality is that if the US had been able to pacify Iraq easily and grab whatever spoils the neo-con crowd lusted after, people wouldn't be talking about Vietnam. Sadly, this isn't a groundswell of moral indignation. It's just that in Iraq, like in Vietnam, we seem to be losing.

We're losing in Iraq on many counts: We control less and less of the country; the violence we are supposedly trying to quell is instead escalating; recon-

struction has been largely a failure; and Iraqis, instead of enjoying freedom from tyranny, are living in a state of abject deprivation and terror.

Losing breeds discontent. It's like Argentina's 1982 invasion of Britain's Falkland Islands colony. The Argentineans ousted their dictatorship after Argentina lost that war, not because the war was wrong but because they lost it. This is why revisionist American history texts never use the word "lost" in connection with the Vietnam war. It just sort of ended. And now the Vietnamese make Nikes.

Iraq is not Vietnam, however. We're dealing with a different geopolitical situation – more a north-south global conflict than an east-west one. Vietnam's significance, the hawks argued, was political. Iraq's significance, of course, is oil.

What is the same is that we're bogged down in a war with no achievable objective, right or wrong, no exit plan and no end in sight. Put the words "quagmire" and "Iraq" into a Lexis/Nexis news database search of major

The reality is that if the US had been able to pacify Iraq easily and grab whatever spoils the neo-con crowd lusted after, people wouldn't be talking about Vietnam

JUST LIKE VIETNAM?

In the end, some troops rioted, a few killed their commanding officers (fratricide emerged as the leading cause of death for lieutenants), up to 33,000 a year went AWOL and an overwhelming number of active-duty grunts refused orders and simply would not fight

American newspapers and you'll come up with 649 articles published in the last six months.

Current Vietnam myths don't accurately address why and how that war ended. First there was the "peace with honor" line pushed by Richard Nixon. Then there was the blame game. We could have "won" if we weren't wimps – with "winning," I assume, meaning destroying Vietnam in its entirety and forcing the US-created South Vietnamese dictatorship on whatever poor souls survived a thermonuclear holocaust. ("Bomb Hanoi" was the pro-war battle cry.) Then there was the admission that the war was lost, but with the caveat that it was lost at home. The peaceniks ruined our will to "stay the course." This theory gives the peace movement full blame or credit for finally ending the war, depending on how you look at it.

History, however, is far more complex. Ultimately the war ended because US armed forces just stopped fighting. A 1975 study published in *The Journal of Social Issues* documents how US troops, proportionally, opposed the war more than college students. In the end, some troops rioted, a few killed their commanding officers (fratricide emerged as the leading cause of death for lieutenants), up to 33,000 a year went AWOL and an overwhelming number of active-duty grunts refused orders and simply would not fight. The military was in shambles. It was impossible to continue the ground war, while the air war was politically untenable without the ground war to justify it.

The war ended when the peace

movement and the military became one and the same. In fact, returning soldiers played a pivotal role in building the peace movement. Veterans placed anti-war ads in newspapers as early as 1965. That's the forbidden history we cannot know – because it's the formula for ending wars. The revisionist history paints a picture of gung-ho patriotic soldiers being "spit upon" by "traitorous anti-American" peace activists. For the last 20 years, peace activists have had to contend with this image of self-righteous, violent, troop-hating hypocrisy.

Spitting hippies

For the pro-war crowd, the image of the hippie spitting on the returning soldier has become the iconic image of the Vietnam war. Oddly, however, this "image" exists despite the absence of any photographic evidence of a single spitting incident. Vietnam veteran and sociology professor Jerry Lembcke spent years chasing this myth, eventually writing a comprehensive historical study, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*, published by NYU Press (1998).

Lembcke found an odd similarity in many of the spitting stories. The incident often happened to returning soldiers as they arrived at the San Francisco airport, with a young hippie woman doing the spitting. In doing his research, however, he found no news stories about soldiers being spit upon, even though the press was generally hostile to the anti-war movement. Likewise, he couldn't find any reports documenting such incidents, though stories

of pro-war demonstrators spitting on peace activists were plentiful. And even though the supposed incidents usually occurred in well policed airports, no one was arrested for spitting on a vet.

Even odder, there are no reports of any veteran retaliating physically against a spitter, as if after months or years of fighting, returning vets suddenly embraced pacifism in the face of humiliating abuse. And despite the supposed predictability surrounding the alleged incidents – you know, hippie women loitering around the San Francisco airport waiting for uniformed soldiers to arrive – no one was ever able to produce photo of a spitting incident.

Lembcke writes, “Not only is there no evidence that these acts of hostility against veterans ever occurred, there is no evidence that anyone at the time thought they were occurring.” In fact, he adds, “Ninety-nine percent of the veterans polled soon after returning described their reception by close friends and family as friendly, while 94 percent said the reception from people their own age who had not served in the armed forces was [also] friendly.” Lembcke’s study shows that “stories of veterans being abused by anti-war activists only surfaced years after the abuses were alleged to have happened.” Most of these stories emerged after the popular Rambo films and other movies strengthened this myth and created a collective conscious memory of events that do not seem to have transpired – or at least did not transpire on any significant level.

Myths of soldiers being abused by peace activists have long been main-

stays in pro-war propaganda, with early examples coming from the Nazis, who compared their opponents to mythological peace activists who supposedly attacked and degraded returning veterans from World War I. This turned out to be a winning formula for marginalizing dissent and has been used around the world ever since.

Hanoi Jane and the GI uprising

Then there’s the Hanoi Jane myth: Like the other peace activists who hated our troops, Jane Fonda was a traitor.

It’s a little-known fact that Fonda went to Vietnam, like her pro-war nemesis Bob Hope, as an entertainer performing in front of as many as 60,000 soldiers at a single event – a number that would have turned Hope green with envy. Fonda toured with anti-war activists who appeared with her on stage. And the GI audience cheered wildly as they performed their Fuck the Army show. Pro-war soldiers – and there were plenty of those as well – hated her. It’s their voice that we hear almost exclusively today, building the myth of a schism between the peace movement and the grunts fighting the Vietnam war. With this media-enhanced stigma hanging over her head, Fonda refrained from speaking at anti-war rallies for 34 years – until January. She feared her presence and the association with this persistent myth would hurt the peace movement.

Another lost piece of history is the story of the GI underground press. According to the Department of Defense, active-duty, Vietnam-era service personnel had published 245 anti-war

“Stories of veterans being abused by anti-war activists only surfaced years after the abuses were alleged to have happened”

JUST LIKE VIETNAM?

More and more, the war the military was fighting was not against the Vietnamese. We had met the enemy and he was us

newsletters and newspapers by 1972, with their editors, writers, distributors and even readers risking court-martial and jail. There was even a GI-run pirate anti-war radio station operating for a short time in Saigon. Government officials took the threat of the GI peace movement extremely seriously, going as far as to court-martial an officer in 1971 for distributing copies of the Declaration of Independence at McChord Air Force Base. The base's underground newspaper reported the case.

That same year, 380 military and civilian police were called in to Travis Air Force Base to combat an anti-war rebellion that resulted in the burning of the Officer's Club and the arrest of 135 GIs. Also in 1971, the Armed Forces Journal published a study entitled "The Collapse of the Armed Forces" documenting a virtual global uprising by US combat troops. Government studies produced at this time document that 32 percent of active-duty service personnel participated in some form of resistance ranging from going AWOL to attacking officers. A report issued by the Army documents 86 officers murdered by their troops in that one branch of the service. Attacks injured another 700.

In 1972 the House Armed Services Committee reported hundreds of cases of sabotage disabling Navy equipment, including major instances of arson on two ships. The vessel dispatched to replace one of these fire-damaged ships was delayed by an onboard riot. Another ship was disabled a few weeks later by a strike. Meanwhile court-martialed service personnel were rioting in military stockades around the world.

As 1972 rolled to a close, it became clear to the Nixon administration that "staying the course" in Vietnam was no longer an option. More and more, the war the military was fighting was not against the Vietnamese. We had met the enemy and he was us.

Iraq war soldiers want out

Fast-forward to Iraq. A Le Moyne College/Zogby poll conducted last February found that 72 percent of active duty military personnel wanted a complete pullout from Iraq by the end of 2006. A contingent of active-duty service personnel marched as participants in a massive anti-war rally in Washington, DC. 1,171 active-duty service personnel signed an "Appeal for Redress" demanding that the US Congress support an immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. Sixty percent of the signatories had fought in Iraq.

When you join the military you, in effect, waive your constitutional rights as an American – including the right to free speech. Active-duty military personnel can't show "disrespect" for the president or their commanding officers. Nor can they make statements that "subvert the mission of the military" or wear their uniform when protesting. And the Department of Defense's "Guidelines for Handling Dissent and Protest Among Members of the Armed Forces" prohibits activities such as petitioning Congress. Hence their statement was an "Appeal for Redress" and not a petition – a gray area that works when the petitioner is joined by 1,170 others. We call this a critical mass.

There are also a growing number of

in-your-face deserters living both in Canada and underground in the US. One such war resister, Carl Webb, went as far as to maintain a Web site while he was on the run. The military ended this embarrassing situation not by finding and prosecuting him, but by discharging him, albeit dishonorably.

The all-"volunteer" armed forces

Speculation about a Vietnam-style GI uprising is often tempered by the argument that during the Vietnam war era, most soldiers were reluctant draftees. Today we have an all-volunteer military. The inference is that the military is now a career choice and that today's fighters are gung ho to excel.

The counter argument is that we do in fact have a draft today. The skyrocketing cost of a college education coupled with cuts in student aid, and the disappearance of good entry-level jobs in the US economy, has, many argue, created an economic draft. As a result, the vast majority of Iraq and Afghanistan casualties come from poor and working-class backgrounds.

Former NBC News correspondent Peter Laufer, author of *Mission Rejected: US Soldiers Who Say No to Iraq* (Chelsea Green, 2006), interviews military resisters such as AWOL soldier Ryan Johnson, who says he joined because he was poor, describing himself as "a guy who made a wrong decision who wants a forklift job." Another told Laufer that he couldn't support his family on a McDonald's salary. In effect, while we might not have an official military draft, the new Wal Mart economy has stepped up to the plate to keep the

supply of cannon fodder coming.

Then there's the "stopgap" draft. The military reserves the right to "call up," or draft, military veterans who have served their time and earned honorable discharges, but technically remain in what the Pentagon calls the Independent Ready Reserves. These draftees, people who served and chose to leave military life only to be put back into the military against their will, make up the angriest and most vocal group of today's military resisters. That's because they, like their Vietnam predecessors, are clearly draftees.

People who feel that today's volunteer military is less likely to engage in resistance and disobedience need to look back at another little-known fact about the Vietnam war. According to David Cortright, author of *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Haymarket Books, 2005), enlisted troops were more likely to resist fighting than were draftees. Many joined out of patriotism and were sorely disappointed with the reality on the ground in Vietnam. Others, like today's volunteers, were victims of an economic draft.

Also, during the Vietnam war, once soldiers served on one tour of duty, they were done with Vietnam. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, however, almost one third of the 1.4 million service members who were deployed to the war zones were deployed at least twice – and many considered their second rounds more or less a draft.

And, finally, there's the National Guard – the "weekend warriors," many attracted by educational benefits, who

In effect, while we might not have an official military draft, the new Wal Mart economy has stepped up to the plate to keep the supply of cannon fodder coming

JUST LIKE VIETNAM?

Today National Guard troops from all 50 states and Puerto Rico are dying in Afghanistan and Iraq. They didn't sign up for this. In effect, they, like the stopgap veterans, are draftees

signed up primarily to serve their communities during natural disasters. The National Guard was never a part of the Vietnam equation. It's where George W. Bush hid out during the Vietnam war, before finally going AWOL himself.

Today National Guard troops from all 50 states and Puerto Rico are dying in Afghanistan and Iraq. Others are having their lives upended. They didn't sign up for this. In effect, they, like the stopgap veterans, are draftees. And for the most part they don't support this war or this president.

Our not-so-free press

Reporting on military resistance puts journalists in the middle of a minefield. The political and economic pressure to ignore this story and just go with the yellow ribbons has been enormous. Anti-war activity by active military personnel, in most cases, is illegal, even when it's nonviolent and no property is threatened. Encouraging such activity is

also illegal – and potentially dangerous in a country whose press freedoms are in a freefall. The US, once a beacon of free speech, is now ranked by the international journalism group Reporters Without Borders as 53rd in press freedom, tied with Botswana, Croatia and Tonga. It is legal to report, for example, on soldiers going AWOL, but is illegal to encourage, in print or otherwise, soldiers to go AWOL or to otherwise resist military duties.

What we can legally say is that resistance to war by active-duty military personnel, like fighting in war, is a brave act. Conscientious objection to war takes courage. Saying no is no more cowardly than saying yes to something you feel is wrong. Resisting the command to put your own life in peril when you don't see a reason to do so is an expression of sanity. We have a right to support sanity over insanity. **CT**

Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism at Buffalo State College

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NO DEFENSE AGAINST PERSECUTION

BY SARAH SHIELDS

Has anyone told you that you look like Gandhi?" my companion asked Professor Sami al-Arian. Al-Arian was sitting behind a plastic wall, wearing striped prison clothes and speaking into two telephones.

It was easy not only to see the resemblance, but also to feel it. Dr. al-Arian has a strikingly similar smile, Gandhi-like eyes and the same lean frame as he finished the first week of his hunger strike. More remarkable, after being both prosecuted and persecuted, he maintains his confidence in the rule of law, the American system of justice and the basic goodness of his persecutors. And he has come through it all with his good nature and sense of humor, despite his weakening condition.

Dr. Sami al-Arian has now spent four years in jail, three of those in solitary confinement while awaiting trial. In December 2005, despite years to prepare the case against him, and an estimated \$80 million dollars of American tax money to pursue it, Dr. al-Ar-

ian was acquitted of eight of the 17 charges against him, including conspiracy to commit racketeering, conspiracy to murder and maim people abroad, conspiracy to support a foreign terrorist organization (two counts), mail fraud (two counts) and obstruction of justice (two counts). After agreeing in a plea bargain to a single charge in exchange for being released and deported, more than a year after his acquittal he is still imprisoned. I visited him at Northern Neck Regional Jail in Warsaw, Virginia, where he is being held for contempt of court for refusing to testify in an unrelated matter.

The United States government was deeply embarrassed after this acquittal in a high-profile trial that was to have been a showcase for the USA PATRIOT Act. After being imprisoned under conditions condemned by Amnesty International, in lock-down 23 hours a day for 37 months before his trial, regularly shackled and strip-searched, denied religious services, refused adequate access to the docu-

Dr. Sami al-Arian has now spent four years in jail, three of those in solitary confinement while awaiting trial

He agreed to deportation in return for the termination of all legal proceedings against him, and what al-Arian believed was a good-faith commitment relieving him of the obligation to testify against others

ments necessary to prepare his defense (tens of thousands of pages of transcripts from years of electronic surveillance), after being brought into the courtroom heavily shackled and treated as a terrorist, al-Arian was gracious in victory.

For Sami al-Arian, the jury's verdict reinforced the confidence he had always held in both the United States and her system of justice. Addressing the court, he thanked his attorneys and his adopted country:

"This process, your Honor, affirmed my belief in the true meaning of a democratic society, in which the independence of the judiciary, the integrity of the jury system and the system of checks and balances are upheld, despite intense political and public pressures ... It's also my belief that an impartial and conscientious jury, as well as principled judicial rulings that uphold the values of the constitution, are the real vehicles that win the hearts and minds of people across the globe, especially in the Arab and Muslim world."

The American Civil Liberties Union wrote to the government arguing that retrying Dr. al-Arian "following the recent acquittal of all serious charges lodged against him would appear to be pointless and vindictive."

As the government refused to preclude a retrial, and with exhausted attorneys and inadequate funds to pursue a defense against the remaining counts (on which two jurors remained unconvinced), the defendant decided to conclude a plea deal. Dr. al-Arian pled guilty to one of the re-

maining charges against him solely in order to be finished with his ordeal. He agreed to deportation in return for the termination of all legal proceedings against him, and what al-Arian believed was a good-faith commitment relieving him of the obligation to testify against others.

U.S. District Judge James Moody seemed unswayed even by the arguments of the prosecutors, and sentenced Dr. al-Arian to another 11 months jail, to be completed in April 2007. But it seems the government is unwilling to carry out this agreement.

Refused to testify

In October 2006 U.S. Attorney Gordon Kromberg asked a grand jury to subpoena Professor al-Arian to testify in a case involving a Muslim think-tank. Pointing out that testifying had been explicitly deleted from the plea bargain, with the specific consent of the prosecutors in Florida, he refused.

As he explained it to us, his refusal comes from two places. First, he considers it inconsistent with his faith and his values to testify. Second, he anticipates that any testimony would be used to create new "facts" to re-arrest him. His fear seems well-founded. At a hearing in 2000, a government attorney asked whether Dr. al-Arian believed that Islam could only be liberated through violence. Professor al-Arian's response, of course, was "No."

One of the 17 counts against him in 2003 was perjury: The government contends he lied when responding that violence was not required to lib-

erate Islam.

Responding to being placed in civil contempt, al-Arian pointed out that he had “no contempt whatsoever for this honorable court, but all the respect in the world for it.” It seems, instead, that it is the government that has contempt for the legal system al-Arian has relied upon and admired for decades. Instead of respecting the plea agreement, Kromberg referred to it as a “bonanza.” Despite having been found guilty of nothing by a U.S. court, Judge Moody and Kromberg persist in their belief in al-Arian’s culpability. It appears that Kromberg’s attitude is based in part on Sami al-Arian’s religion.

Attorney Jack Fernandez requested that Kromberg delay al-Arian’s transfer to Virginia until the end of Ramadan. Fernandez quoted Kromberg’s response in an affidavit, “If they can kill each other during Ramadan, they can appear before the grand jury, all they can’t do is eat before sunset. I believe Mr. al-Arian’s request is part of the attempted Islamization of the American justice aystem. I am not going to put off Dr. al-Arian’s grand jury appearance just to assist in what is becoming the Islamization of America.” Gordon Kromberg has denied a request to recuse himself in this case.

It was both Sami al-Arian’s religious faith, and his faith in our system of government that got him arrested in 2003. Al-Arian actually believes what we say about freedom of worship, and has spent years trying to inform Americans about Islam. Stunned by the events of 9/11, he agreed to talk

with Bill O’Reilly about Muslim responses to the tragedy. To his surprise, the FOX News host attacked him, relentlessly interrogating him about an investigation dating back to 1993, in which al-Arian had been found blameless years earlier.

Within days, Professor al-Arian had been fired from the University of South Florida, where he had taught for 15 years, despite his tenure. As opposition mounted, and the American Association of University Professors threatened sanctions against the University of South Florida, the university’s president got the help she needed: the FBI resurrected the old allegations and al-Arian was arrested.

Guilty of being a Muslim

It appears now that, despite being exonerated by a jury of his peers, Sami al-Arian has been found guilty – guilty of being a Muslim and a Palestinian. In the years since 9/11, more and more Muslims and Arabs have been accused of terrorism, their lives put on hold, their families divided, their freedom denied. In the face of new legislation suspending habeus corpus and stripping even U.S. citizens of their rights to a swift and fair trial, Professor al-Arian’s experience is a frightening foreshadowing of the futures of those who would count on American freedoms of religion, speech and dissent.

Dr. al-Arian continues to have faith in our system and in our country. He told the court at his sentencing:

“As I leave I harbor no bitterness or resentment. Looking back at my three decades in America, I’m indeed grate-

Despite having been found guilty of nothing by a U.S. court, Judge Moody and Kromberg persist in their belief in al-Arian’s culpability. It appears that Kromberg’s attitude is based in part on Sami al-Arian’s religion

JUSTICE ON TRIAL

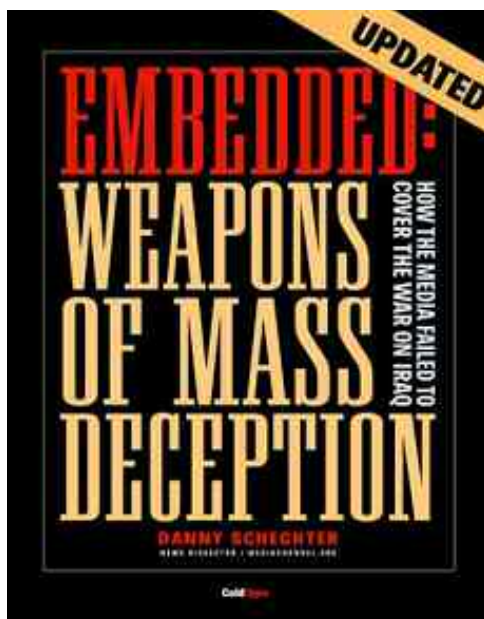
"I'm grateful that my five wonderful children were born and raised in a society that provided them with freedom and equal opportunities"

ful for the opportunities afforded to the son of stateless Palestinian refugees in a foreign country, while denied such opportunity in his country of origin and the countries where he was born or raised. I'm grateful that my five wonderful children were born and raised in a society that provided them with freedom and equal opportunities in order to reach their potential."

Sami al-Arian's children, and my

children, need the American system of justice to prevail. Time is running out for Professor al-Arian as he continues to refuse food to protest the injustice of his continuing imprisonment. Time is running out for justice if Americans refuse to insist on the enforcement of our constitution. **CT**

Sarah Shields teaches Middle East history at UNC/Chapel Hill. This essay originally appeared at TomPaine.org



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HOW MIDDLE AMERICA MADE ME FEEL SAFER

BY ROBERT FISK

Every time I enter the United States, I wonder what the lads in Homeland Security have in store for me. But this time Chicago was a piece of cake. I was arriving from Lebanon, I told the young man at the desk, and I was to address a Muslim conference. “Gee, you must have had a bad time out there in Lebanon,” he commiserated, stamping my passport in less than 30 seconds and handing it back to me with a script-writer’s greeting: “There you go, partner.” And so I passed through the barrier, saddled up my white Palomino in the parking lot, and rode off towards the crescent Islamic moon that hung over Chicago. Hi Ho Fisk, Away!

I had forgotten how many American Muslims were south-west Asian rather than Middle Eastern in origin, Pakistani and Indian by family rather than Syrian or Egyptian or Lebanese or Saudi. But the largely Sunni congregation of 32,000 gathered for the Islamic Society of North America’s annual gig were not the hot-dog sellers, bellhops and taxi drivers of New York. They

were part of the backbone of middle America, corporate lawyers, real estate developers, construction engineers, and owners of chain-store outlets.

Nor were these the docile, hang-dog, frightened Muslims we have grown used to writing about in the aftermath of the international crimes against humanity of 11 September 2001. To about 12,000 of these Muslims in a vast auditorium, I said the Middle East had never been so dangerous. I condemned the Hizbollah leader, Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, for saying he had no idea the Israelis would have responded so savagely to the capture of two Israeli soldiers and the killing of three others on 12 July. Later, a worthy imam told me: “I thought what you said about Sheikh Hassan (sic) was almost an insult.” But that clearly wasn’t what the audience believed.

When I told them that as American Muslims, they could demand a right of reply when lobby groups maliciously claimed that a network of suicide bombers was plotting within their totally law-abiding community, they

Nor were these the docile, hang-dog, frightened Muslims we have grown used to writing about in the aftermath of the international crimes against humanity of 11 September 2001

But who at the Star had decided that an Israeli town with one dead every year equalled the Ground Zero of Manhattan's 3,000 dead in two hours? All dead are equal in the North American press it seems, but some are more equal than others

roared. But I warned them that I would listen carefully to their response to my next sentence. And then I said that they must feel free to condemn – and should condemn – the Muslim regimes that used torture and oppression, even if these dictators lived in the lands from which their families came. And those thousands of Muslims rose to their feet and clapped and yelled their agreement with more emotion and fervour than any rabble-rousing non-Muslim yelling about “Arab terrorism”. This was not what I had expected.

Signing copies of the American edition of my book on the Middle East some hours later – the real reason, of course, for going to Chicago – these same people came up to me to explain they were not American Muslims but Muslim Americans, that Islam was not incompatible with life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Some had stories of great tragedy. One young man had written out a short sentence for me to inscribe in the front of his copy of my book. “To my parents and siblings,” he had written on a pink slip, “who perished in the hands of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Yousos Adam.” I looked up to find the young man crying. “I am against war, you see,” he said, and vanished into the crowd. There were other more ingratiating folk around: the Pakistani broadcaster, for example, who wanted me to talk about his country’s peace-loving principles – until I began describing the continued secret relationship between Pakistan’s intelligence service and the Taliban, at which the interview was swiftly concluded.

Then there was the young man with Asiatic features who said softly that he was “Mr Yee, the Guantanamo imam” – who turned out to be the same Mr Yee foully and falsely accused by the US authorities of passing al-Qa’ida type messages while ministering to the prisoners of al-Qa’ida at America’s most luxurious prison camp. But there was no bitterness among any of these people. Only a kind of growing pain at the way the press and television in America continued to paint them – and all other Muslims in the world – as an alien, cruel, sadistic race.

Unequal coverage

One woman produced an article of June this year from the Toronto Star about the Israeli town of Sderot, the target of hundreds of Palestinian missiles from Gaza. “Under fire at Israel’s Ground Zero,” ran the headline. “Do you believe in this kind of journalism, Mr Fisk?” the woman demanded to know. And I was about to give her the “both sides of the picture” lecture when I noticed from the article that just five Israelis had been killed in Sderot in five years. Yes, every life is equal. But who at the Star had decided that an Israeli town with one dead every year equalled the Ground Zero of Manhattan’s 3,000 dead in two hours? All dead are equal in the North American press it seems, but some are more equal than others.

And I couldn’t help noticing the degree to which The New York Times’s Thomas Friedman is stoking the fires. This is the same man, an old friend, who wrote a few years ago that the Palestinians believed in “child sacrifice”

– because they allowed their kids to throw stones at Israeli soldiers who then obligingly gunned them down. Most egregiously for the Muslims I spoke to, Friedman was now “animalising” – as one girl put it beautifully – the Iraqis, and she presented me with a Friedman clipping which ended with these words: “It will be a global tragedy if they (the insurgent Iraqi enemy) succeed, but ... the US government can’t keep asking Americans to sacrifice their children for people who hate each other more than they love their own children.”

So there we go again, I thought. Muslims sacrifice their children. Muslims feel hate more than they love their children. No wonder, I suppose, that

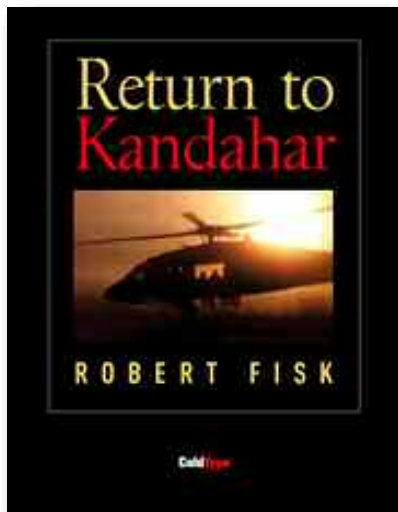
their kiddies keep getting Israeli bullets through their hearts in Gaza and American bullets through their hearts in Iraq and Israeli bombs smashing them to death in Lebanon. It’s all the Arabs’ fault. And yet here in Chicago were 32,000 Muslims, dismissing all the calumnies and sophistries and lies and saying they were proud to be Americans. And I guess – for a man who wakes each morning in his Beirut apartment, wondering where the next explosion will be – that I felt a little safer in this world. **CT**

And yet here in Chicago were 32,000 Muslims, dismissing all the calumnies and sophistries and lies and saying they were proud to be Americans

Robert Fisk is the author of The Great War For Civilisation.

This article originally appeared in The Independent newspaper of London

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ROBERT FISK

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To mark the anniversary of the Sept 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon and US-led 'war on terror,' Robert Fisk, Middle East correspondent of London's *Independent* returned to Afghanistan where he wrote scathing essays on a bombing offensive to rid the country of its Taliban rulers and Bin Laden's al-Qa'ida leaders.

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EXPLODING THE 9/11 CONSPIRACY

BY GEORGE MONBIOT

Unlike the other 9/11 conspiracy films, *Loose Change* is sharp and swift, with a thumping soundtrack, slick graphics and a calm and authoritative voiceover

*In a recent column in London's Guardian newspaper, author George Monbiot criticised the film *Loose Change*, which airs many of the conspiracy theories about the 9/11 attacks on the United States. His essay provoked 777 responses on the newspaper's Comment Is Free blog and led to a follow up piece by Monbiot. Both of his columns are reprinted here*

PART 1

Short Changed

9/11 conspiracism is dragging activists away from the real issues

There is a virus sweeping the world. It infects opponents of the Bush government, sucks their brains out through their eyes and turns them into gibbering idiots. First cultivated in a laboratory in the United States, the strain reached these shores a few months ago. In the past fortnight it has become an epi-

demio. Scarcely a day now passes without someone possessed by this sickness, eyes rolling, lips flecked with foam, trying to infect me. The disease is called *Loose Change*. It is a film made by three young men which airs most of the standard conspiracy theories about the attacks of September 11 2001. Unlike the other 9/11 conspiracy films, *Loose Change* is sharp and swift, with a thumping soundtrack, slick graphics and a calm and authoritative voiceover. Its makers claim that it has now been watched by 100 million people. The Pentagon, the film maintains, was not hit by a commercial airliner. There was "no discernable trace" of a plane found in the wreckage, and the entrance and exit holes in the building were far too small. It was hit by a Cruise missile. The twin towers were brought down by means of "a carefully planned controlled demolition". You can see the small puffs of smoke caused by explosives just below the cascading sections. All other hypotheses are implausible: the fire was not hot enough to melt steel and the towers fell too quickly. Building 7 was

destroyed by the same means a few hours later.

Flight 93 did not crash, but was redirected to Cleveland Airport, where the passengers were taken into a NASA building and never seen again. Their voices had been cloned by the Los Alamos laboratories and used to make fake calls to their relatives. The footage of Osama Bin Laden, claiming responsibility for the attacks, was faked. The US government carried out this great crime for four reasons: to help Larry Silverstein, who leased the towers, to collect his insurance money; to assist insider traders betting on falling airline stocks; to steal the gold in the basement; and to grant George Bush new executive powers, so that he could carry out his plans for world domination.

A few problems

Even if you have seen or read no other accounts of 9/11, and your brain has not yet been liquidised, a few problems must occur to you. The first is the complete absence of scientific advice. At one point the presenter asks “So what brought down the Twin Towers? Let’s ask the experts.” But they don’t ask the experts. The film makers take some old quotes, edit them to remove any contradictions, then denounce all subsequent retractions as further evidence of conspiracy.

The only people they interview are a janitor, a group of firemen and a flight instructor. They let the janitor speak at length, but cut the firemen off in mid-sentence. The flight instructor speaks in short clips, which give the impression that his pupil, the hijacker Hani Han-

jour, was incapable of hitting the Pentagon. Elsewhere he has said the opposite: he had “no doubt” that Hanjour could have done it⁽¹⁾.

Where are the structural engineers, the materials scientists, the specialists in ballistics, explosives or fire? The film makers now say that the third edition of the film will be fact-checked by an expert, but he turns out to be “a theology professor”⁽²⁾. They don’t name him, but I would bet that it’s David Ray Griffin, who also happens to be the high priest of the 9/11 conspiracists.

The next evident flaw is that the plot they propose must have involved tens of thousands of people. It could not have been executed without the help of demolition experts, the security firms guarding the World Trade Centre, Mayor Giuliani (who hastily disposed of the remains), much of the US Air Force, the Federal Aviation Administration and the North American Aerospace Defense Command, the relatives of the people “killed” in the plane crashes, the rest of the Pentagon’s staff, the Los Alamos laboratories, the FBI, the CIA and the investigators who picked through the rubble.

If there is one universal American characteristic it is a confessional culture which permits no one with a good story to keep his mouth shut. People appear on the Jerry Springer Show to admit to carnal relations with their tractors. Yet none of the participants in this monumental crime has sought to blow the whistle – before, during or after the attacks. No one has volunteered to tell the greatest story ever told.

Read some conflicting accounts, and

Even if you have seen or read no other accounts of 9/11, and your brain has not yet been liquidised, a few problems must occur to you. The first is the complete absence of scientific advice

WHO DID IT?

As the perimeter columns buckled, the weight of the collapsing top stories generated a momentum the rest of the building could not arrest. Puffs of smoke were blown out of the structure by compression as the building fell

Loose Change's case crumbles faster than the Twin Towers. Hundreds of people saw a plane hit the Pentagon. Because it collided with one of the world's best-defended buildings at full speed, the plane was pulverised: even so, both plane parts and body parts were in fact recovered. The wings and tail disintegrated when they hit the wall, which is why the holes weren't bigger⁽³⁾.

The failure of the Twin Towers has been exhaustively documented by the National Institute of Standards and Technology. Far from being impossible, the collapse turns out to have been inevitable. The planes cut some of the support columns and ignited fires sufficient to weaken (but not melt) the remaining steel structures. As the perimeter columns buckled, the weight of the collapsing top stories generated a momentum the rest of the building could not arrest. Puffs of smoke were blown out of the structure by compression as the building fell⁽⁴⁾.

Counterpunch, the radical leftwing magazine, commissioned its own expert – an aerospace and mechanical engineer – to test the official findings⁽⁵⁾. He shows that the institute must have been right. He also demonstrates how Building 7 collapsed. Burning debris falling from the twin towers ruptured the oil pipes feeding its emergency generators. The reduction in pressure triggered the automatic pumping system, which poured thousands of gallons of diesel onto the fire. The support trusses weakened and buckled and the building imploded⁽⁶⁾. Popular Mechanics magazine polled 300 experts and came to the

same conclusions⁽⁷⁾.

So the critics – even Counterpunch – are labelled co-conspirators, and the plot expands until it comes to involve a substantial part of the world's population. There is no reasoning with this madness. People believe Loose Change because it proposes a closed world: comprehensible, controllable, small. Despite the great evil which runs it, it is more companionable than the chaos which really governs our lives, a world without destination or purpose.

Real issues

This neat story draws campaigners away from real issues – global warming, the Iraq war, nuclear weapons, privatisation, inequality – while permanently wrecking their credibility. Bush did capitalise on the attacks, and he did follow a pre-existing agenda, spelt out, as Loose Change says, by the Project for a New American Century. But by drowning this truth in an ocean of nonsense, the conspiracists ensure that it can never again be taken seriously.

The film's greatest flaw is this: the men who made it are still alive. If the US government is running an all-knowing, all-encompassing conspiracy, why did it not snuff them out long ago? There is only one possible explanation. They are in fact agents of the Bush regime, employed to distract people from its real abuses of power. This, if you are inclined to believe such stories, is surely a more plausible theory than the one proposed in Loose Change.

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PART 2

Bayoneting a scarecrow

9/11 conspiracy theories are a coward's cult

"You did this hit piece because your corporate masters instructed you to. You are a controlled asset of the New World Order ... bought and paid for."⁽¹⁾ "Everyone has some skeleton in the cupboard. How else would MI5 and the Special Branch recruit agents?"⁽²⁾ "Shill, traitor, sleeper", "leftwing gatekeeper", "accessory after the fact", "political whore of the biggest conspiracy of them all."

These are a few of the measured responses to my article about the film *Loose Change*, in The Guardian two weeks ago, which maintains that the US government destroyed the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Having spent years building up my left-wing credibility on behalf of my paymasters in MI5, I've blown it. I overplayed my hand, and have been exposed, like Bush and Cheney, by a bunch of kids with laptops. My handlers are furious.

I believe that George Bush is surrounded by some of the most scheming, devious, ruthless men to have found their way into government since the days of the Borgias. I believe that they were criminally negligent in failing to respond to intelligence about a potential attack by Al Qaeda, and that they have sought to disguise their incompetence by classifying crucial documents. I believe, too, that the Bush government seized the opportunity provided by the attacks to pursue a long-standing plan to invade Iraq and reshape the Middle East, knowing full well that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with 9/11. Bush deliberately misled the American people about the links between 9/11 and Iraq and about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. He is responsible for the murder of many tens of thousands of Iraqis.

But none of this is sufficient. To qualify as a true opponent of the Bush regime, you must also now believe that it is capable of magic. It could blast the Pentagon with a cruise missile, while persuading hundreds of onlookers that they saw a plane. It could wire every

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WHO DID IT?

You must believe that Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and their pals are all-knowing, all-seeing and all-powerful, despite the fact that they were incapable of faking either weapons of mass destruction or any evidence at Ground Zero that Saddam Hussein was responsible

floor of the Twin Towers with explosives without attracting attention, and prime the charges (though planes had ploughed through the middle of the sequence) to drop each tower in a perfectly-timed collapse. It could make Flight 93 disappear into thin air, and somehow ensure that the relatives of the passengers collaborated with the deception. It could recruit tens of thousands of conspirators to participate in these great crimes, and induce them all to kept their mouths shut, for ever.

In other words, you must believe that Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and their pals are all-knowing, all-seeing and all-powerful, despite the fact that they were incapable of faking either weapons of mass destruction or any evidence at Ground Zero that Saddam Hussein was responsible. You must believe that the impression of cackhandedness and incompetence they have managed to project since taking office is a front. Otherwise you are a traitor and a spy.

Why bother?

Why do I bother with these morons? Because they are destroying the movements which some of us have spent a long time trying to build. Those of us who believe that the crucial global issues – climate change, the Iraq war, nuclear proliferation, inequality – are insufficiently debated in parliament or congress; that corporate power stands too heavily on democracy; that war criminals, cheats and liars are not being held to account, have invested our efforts in movements outside the mainstream political process. These, we are

now discovering, are peculiarly susceptible to this epidemic of gibberish.

The obvious corollary to the belief that the Bush administration is all-powerful is that the rest of us are completely powerless. In fact it seems to me that the purpose of the “9/11 truth movement” is to be powerless. The omnipotence of the Bush regime is the coward’s fantasy, an excuse for inaction used by those who don’t have the stomach to engage in real political fights.

Let me give you an example. The column I wrote about Loose Change two weeks ago generated 777 posts on Comment is Free, which is almost a record. Most of them were furious.. The response from a producer of the film, published last week, attracted 467⁽²⁾. On the same day I published an article about a genuine, demonstrable conspiracy: a spy network feeding confidential information from an arms control campaign to Britain’s biggest weapons manufacturer, BAE. It drew 60 responses⁽³⁾.

The members of the 9/11 cult weren’t interested. If they were, they might have had to do something. The great virtue of a fake conspiracy is that it calls on you to do nothing.

The 9/11 conspiracy theories are a displacement activity. A displacement activity is something you do because you feel incapable of doing what you ought to do. A squirrel sees a larger squirrel stealing its hoard of nuts. Instead of attacking its rival, it sinks its teeth into a tree and starts ripping it to pieces.

Faced with the mountainous chal-

lenge of the real issues we must confront, the chickens in the “truth” movement focus instead on a fairytale, knowing that nothing they do or say will count, knowing that because the perpetrators don’t exist, they can’t fight back. They demonstrate their courage by repeatedly bayoneting a scarecrow.

Many of those who posted responses on The Guardian’s weblog Comment is Free contend that Loose Change (which was neatly demolished in the BBC’s film *The Conspiracy Files*) is a poor representation of the conspiracists’ case. They urge us instead to visit websites like 911truth.org, physics911.net and 911scholars.org, and to read articles by the theology professor David Ray Griffin and the physicist Steven E. Jones.

Concerned that I might have missed something, I have now done all those things, and have come across exactly the same concatenation of ill-attested nonsense as I saw in Loose Change. In all these cases you will find wild supposition raised to the status of incontrovertible fact; rumour and confusion transformed into evidence; selective editing; the citation of fake experts; the dismissal of real ones.

Doubtless I will now be told that these are not the true believers: I will need to dive into another vat of tripe to get to the heart of the conspiracy.

The 9/11 truthers remind me of nothing so much as the climate-change deniers, cherry-picking their evidence, seizing any excuse for ignoring the arguments of their opponents. Witness the respondents to my Loose Change column who maintain that the magazine *Popular Mechanics*, which has

ripped the demolition theories apart, is a government front. They know this because one of its editors, Benjamin Chertoff, is the brother/nephew/first cousin of the US Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. (They are, as far as Benjamin can discover, unrelated, but what does he know?⁽⁴⁾).

Like the millenarian fantasies which helped to destroy the Levellers as a political force in the mid-17th century, this crazy distraction presents a mortal danger to popular oppositional movements. If I were Bush or Blair, nothing would please me more than to see my opponents making idiots of themselves, while devoting their lives to chasing a phantom. But as a controlled asset of the New World Order, I would say that, wouldn’t I? It’s all part of the plot. **CT**

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George Monbiot’s latest book is Heat: How To Stop The Planet From Burning

These columns were originally published in The Guardian of London

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CHAVEZ AS CASTRO? NOT THAT SIMPLE

BY BART JONES

The situation in Venezuela is a little more complex than what many in the media and the establishment make it out to be. Take, for example, Chavez's decision not to renew the license of RCTV television network when it expires in May

Alarm bells are sounding in Washington, on Wall Street and around the world over President Hugo Chavez's latest moves to consolidate his Bolivarian Revolution in oil-rich Venezuela. He is – we are told – shutting down a television station, creating a single-party state, nationalizing key industries including some major oil projects, threatening perpetual re-election and vowing to impose “21st century socialism.”

On the surface, it seems to Chavez's critics that he is finally doing what they have long predicted – creating a totalitarian state in the image of his mentor, Fidel Castro. But the situation in Venezuela is a little more complex than what many in the media and the establishment make it out to be. Take, for example, Chavez's decision not to renew the license of RCTV television network when it expires in May.

At first blush, this would certainly seem to be reason for alarm – a government shutting down a television station because it doesn't like its editorial bent. But RCTV is not exactly your av-

erage television station. In April 2002, it promoted and participated in a coup against Chavez in which a democratically elected president was overthrown by military rebels and disappeared for two days until large street protests and a counter-coup returned him to power.

For two days prior to the coup, RCTV suspended all regular programming and commercials and ran blanket coverage of a general strike aimed at ousting Chavez. Then it ran non-stop ads encouraging people to attend a massive anti-Chavez march on April 11, 2002, and provided wall-to-wall coverage of the event itself with nary a pro-Chavez voice in sight.

When the protest ended in violence and military rebels overthrew the president, RCTV, along with other networks, imposed a news blackout banning all coverage of pro-Chavez demonstrators in the streets demanding his return. Andres Izarra, a news director at RCTV, was given the order by superiors: zero chavismo en pantalla, no Chavistas on the screen. He quit in disgust and later joined the Chavez gov-

ernment.

On April 13, 2002, after the coup-installed President Pedro Carmona eliminated the Supreme Court and the National Assembly and nullified the Constitution, media barons, including RCTV's main owner, Marcel Granier, met with Carmona in the presidential palace and, according to reports, pledged their support to his regime. While the streets of Caracas literally burned with rage over Chavez's ouster, the television networks ran Hollywood movies like *Pretty Woman*.

Most rabidly anti-government media in the world

Venezuela's media, owned largely by the country's wealthy elites, are arguably the most rabidly antigovernment media in the world. In the past, opposition figures have appeared on television openly calling for a coup against Chavez, who says he is leading a revolution on behalf of Venezuela's majority poor.

Chavez's decision not to renew RCTV's license is not exactly akin to George W. Bush shutting down CBS or NBC because they ran a few stories critical of him. If RCTV were operating in the United States, it's doubtful its actions would last more than a few minutes with the FCC.

Likewise, Chavez is not creating a single-party state as widely reported but is melding together an amorphous array of parties that support him. He is not outlawing opposition parties. He has no need to, as he showed when he glided to a record landslide victory in the Dec. 5 presidential vote by a 63 per-

cent to 37 percent margin in a free and fair election.

Chavez also is not nationalizing the entire economy without compensation to companies, as Castro did in the early days of the Cuban revolution, but rather is buying back a few key strategic utilities such as the CANTV telecommunications company or taking a majority government share in four heavy oil projects in the eastern Orinoco River basin.

While the government has generally compensated owners at fair market value when it has taken over properties or businesses in the past, Chavez said that with CANTV it would deduct debts to workers, pensions and other obligations including a "technological debt" to the state. In the case of the oil projects, Chavez said that by May 1 the government will take at least a 60 percent share in joint ventures with companies including Exxon Mobil Corp., Chevron Corp., ConocoPhillips Co., Total SA and Statoil ASA and compensate them fairly.

"What we want is to negotiate," he said. "We hope these companies cooperate" and agree to become minority partners. He insisted Venezuela does not plan to copy the Soviet or Cuban model of complete state dominance of the economy.

Of course, the jury is out over whether Venezuela's government can run nationalized or partly nationalized companies better than the private sector did. Chavez also has taken other steps that are cause for concern. His decision to seek the power to rule by decree on certain matters for the next 18

In the past, opposition figures have appeared on television openly calling for a coup against Chavez, who says he is leading a revolution on behalf of Venezuela's majority poor

months raises a red flag, along with his expressed desire to eliminate term limits.

The world should remain vigilant to ensure a free press, a free political system and a mixed economy where property rights are respected remain in place in Venezuela. If Chavez infringes on any of these rights, it should be vigorously

protested and condemned. But so far it hasn't happened. **CT**

Bart Jones, a writer at Newsday, is former foreign correspondent for The Associated Press in Venezuela. He is the author of the forthcoming book, Hugo! The Hugo Chavez Story From Mud Hut to Perpetual Revolution.

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WAR OF SHADOWS

BY CHRIS HEDGES

I have spent most of my adult life as a reporter covering insurgencies, from the five years I covered the wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala to seven years in the Middle East and nearby regions, where I covered the two Palestinian uprisings and the civil wars in Algeria and Sudan, and finally to the three years I reported on the wars in the Balkans, including the rebellion in the Serbian province of Kosovo by the Kosovo Liberation Army. Some of these wars were fought with skill, such as the U.S.-led counterinsurgency campaign in El Salvador and the French-backed counterinsurgency in Algeria; others were not, such as the war in Kosovo, fought by a Serbian government whose stupidity and brutality rivaled our own in Iraq.

The plan to send 21,500 more troops to Iraq will be accompanied by a subtle, but disastrous, change in the way the war is fought – a change that will almost assuredly increase the monthly tallies of American dead and wounded. The president warned that

“deadly acts of violence will continue, and we must expect more Iraqi and American casualties.” In his version of the war, these losses will allow us to climb from the sinkhole we have dug for ourselves to the sunlight of victory. Unfortunately, for Iraqis and for us, what the president proposes is a mistake of catastrophic proportions. It defies basic counterinsurgency doctrine and will leave American troops more vulnerable, more exposed and in greater danger in this war of shadows.

A counterinsurgency war is, first and foremost, a political war. It requires a deftness, as well as cultural and political sensitivity, that American troops and commanders, most of whom do not even know enough Arabic to read the road signs in Baghdad, do not possess. Military strikes must always be very limited, infrequent and surgical – a tactic foreign to the terrified 19-year-old kids who unleash 1,000 rounds per minute with their M249 SAWS in crowded Iraqi neighborhoods moments after an im-

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MORE TROOPS?

The occupying forces have learned the hazards of remaining in static positions. But now President Bush, who knows as little about warfare as he does about diplomacy, wants to take away this vital mobility

provised explosive device goes off. The greatest failure in Iraq – a war I always opposed – was to use American forces to occupy the country and then, after sectarian blood lines had been drawn and American troops had killed thousands of innocent Iraqis, set out to try to build a proxy army of quisling Iraqi nationals. It was doomed from the start. We lost the war, and in Iraqi eyes it was defined as our war by the time our invading forces blasted their way into Baghdad.

Conventional armies, such as ours in Iraq, come equipped with inherent strengths that rebels cannot match. These strengths include massive firepower, air support and an integrated intelligence and communications infrastructure that permits rapid and effective responses, as well as the ability, in a fixed firefight, to usually obliterate a rebel band.

But conventional behemoths, especially when they seek to occupy hostile, foreign territory, have serious and often fatal weaknesses, weaknesses that have been deftly exploited in Iraq and especially Baghdad. Most of the new troops will go to Baghdad, doubling the number of combat troops in the Iraqi capital. Four thousand more Marines will go to Iraq's western Anbar province, where U.S. commanders admit that the 30,000 current U.S. troops have lost control to Iraqi resistance fighters. There are now about 140,000 American military personnel in Iraq, of whom about 50,000 are combat troops.

American forces, because they con-

trol the country's infrastructure, must often remain in fixed, static positions. And troops in static positions are easily targeted by small, mobile rebel bands.

During the war in El Salvador new guerrilla recruits, for their first kill, were often sent at night to attack one of the many small bridges held by government troops. The immobile targets were so vulnerable, the newly minted rebel soldiers were almost always assured of success.

Fortified compounds

Soldiers and Marines in Iraq are bottled up in heavily fortified and protected compounds, although even these are hit by periodic mortar rounds and suicide bombers. Troops make forays out of these forts in armored convoys that move very swiftly down the middle of city streets in a show of force or to protect supply lines. It is constant and rapid movement that ensures survival. The occupying forces have learned the hazards of remaining in static positions. But now President Bush, who knows as little about warfare as he does about diplomacy, wants to take away this vital mobility.

"In earlier operations, Iraqi and American forces cleared many neighborhoods of terrorists and insurgents, but when our forces moved on to other targets, the killers returned," the president said. "This time, we'll have the force levels we need to hold the areas that have been cleared. ...

"Our past efforts to secure Baghdad failed for two principal reasons: There were not enough Iraqi and

American troops to secure neighborhoods that had been cleared of terrorists and insurgents,” Bush explained. “And there were too many restrictions on the troops we did have.”

But the president and the few generals willing to swallow their pride and probably their integrity to support him have failed to explain or grasp the realities of occupation. The presence of more troops on the streets of Baghdad, troops who only understand how to impose their will by force, will fuel the rage most Iraqis feel toward their American occupiers. It will heighten the tension and increase the strikes on American forces, which, tied down, will be more easily targeted.

The insurgents – Shiite and Sunni – have done what we failed to do. They have built a vast and effective support network within their communities, communities we were never

able to reach from Humvees or the fortified walls of the Green Zone. Most of the insurgents are Iraqi. They speak Arabic. They worship in the mosques. They buy vegetables in the local markets. They love their country. And many have paid a terrible price for their patriotism and their faith. These neighborhoods are secure. They are just not secure for us. They will never be. And sending in new batches of Americans from Texas or Ohio or New York to patrol these streets will not make Iraq or America safer. It will ensure that even more mothers and fathers, American and Iraqi, will be ushered by George W. Bush into the long night of bitterness and grief.

Chris Hedges, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and former Pulitzer-prize winning foreign correspondent for The New York Times, is the author of American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America

CT

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PROTESTING GITMO

BY FRIDA BERRIGAN

89 people had entered the building earlier in the day and gathered in the atrium to read the names of nearly 400 men who remain imprisoned

On January 11, more than 100 people in orange jumpsuits trudged slowly from the Supreme Court to the Federal District Court in Washington, DC. Black hoods covered their faces. Another 400 protesters followed “the prisoners” as they tried to enter the U.S. court building. This bit of political theater symbolically brought the plight of tortured and indefinitely detained prisoners out of the legal shadows of Guantanamo and into the court, thereby shining a light on the illegality of their treatment and detention.

Five years after the first “war on terrorism” prisoners arrived at Guantanamo – invisible and isolated in their hoods and shackles and orange jumpsuits – the world community sought to draw attention and sympathy to their plight. From Warsaw to Wichita, from Bahrain to Boise, from Birmingham, Alabama to Birmingham, England, more than one hundred protests joined the International Call to Shut Down Guantanamo.

In front of the Federal District Court

– the one that ruled in November that an ailing prisoner at Guantanamo could not gain access to competent (and unbiased) medical attention off base – the theater began. Police turned the hooded prisoners away. But another 89 people had entered the building earlier in the day and gathered in the atrium to read the names of nearly 400 men who remain imprisoned.

It was a haunting litany of loss and lamentation. I took off my sweater to reveal an orange t-shirt emblazoned with “Shut Down Guantanamo: End Torture” and began to read former Guantanamo prisoner Moazzam Begg’s account of arriving at the prison camp.

As we continued our program, the head of the U.S. Marshals Department told us that if we put away our banners and took off our orange t-shirts, we could stay throughout the afternoon. It was an unprecedented offer. But to those committed to bringing the names, cases, and stories of men rendered invisible and unheard by the Bush administration (an injustice largely unchallenged by the U.S. criminal justice

system), it was an unacceptable bargain. We kept reading the names – Saifullah Paracha, Mahbub Rahman, David Hicks, Jumah al Dossari, Abdullah Mohammad Khan.

My hands shook. In my pocket was enough money to get on the subway and an index card with the name “Omar Deghayes, Britain.” Many of us standing in the courthouse atrium did not bring our own identification. We were experimenting with how to move beyond symbolism and concretely bring the name and story of a Guantanamo prisoner to the attention of the courts.

At the same time, the mother and brother of Omar Deghayes were in Guantanamo, Cuba, demanding to be let onto the U.S. military base and reunited with Omar. They had come as part of an international delegation that included peace activists, lawyers, the co-director of the film *The Road to Guantanamo*, and former Guantanamo prisoner Asif Iqbal.

In December 2005, as part of Witness Against Torture, 25 of us had walked more than 100 kilometers to get as close to the U.S. base as we could, fasting and vigiling and calling on U.S. authorities to grant us access to the prison camp.

Journeying from Dubai to Guantanamo a little more than a year later, Omar’s brother Taher and his mother Zohra were now standing in the same spot. Zohra writes of the “excruciating” pain of being so close to her son but unable to enter the base.

Omar “is in this cursed jail for so many years in conditions which are not even fit for animals,” Zohra writes. “I

pray to Allah during every prayer that he is released and that he finds people who treat him kindly and compassionately. My heart is ruptured with sadness.” It is not the first time the Deghayes family has suffered. When Omar and Taher were children, the Qaddafi regime assassinated their father. Zohra sought political asylum in the UK for her family.

Innocent man

By all reports, Omar is an innocent man. A devout Muslim who aspired to be a human rights lawyer, he traveled to Malaysia and Afghanistan in early 2001, got married, and had a child. When the United States invaded Afghanistan, the family fled to Pakistan and made plans to return to England. Instead, Pakistani security forces arrested them in April 2002 and turned them over the U.S. forces in exchange for a \$5,000 bounty.

At Guantanamo, Omar says he was singled out for harsher treatment because of his familiarity with the law and his tendency to stand up for other prisoners. Permanently blinded in one eye when a U.S. guard jabbed him with his finger, Omar has also been subjected to sexual humiliation, has endured high power water jets forced up his nose, and was held in solitary confinement for over eight months. U.S. officials at Guantanamo also allowed Libyan intelligence agents to question and threaten Omar.

At the District Court protest, I focused on Omar, Taher, and Zohra to put my own predicament in perspective. We followed through on our plan to read the names, and the marshals

My hands shook. In my pocket was enough money to get on the subway and an index card with the name “Omar Deghayes, Britain”

DAY IN COURT

When I go back to court, I will have a chance to tell Omar's story

kept to their word as well by arresting us. Held in a cold basement cell for three or four hours, we were released with a citation to appear in Federal District Court on April 18.

When I go back to court, I will have a chance to tell Omar's story. The citation bears my height, weight, and hair color. But the name on the ticket is Omar Deghayes.

As the court cases about Guantanamo grind on – bandied among the Supreme Court, the Federal Court, and the Executive Branch – the movement to shut down Guantanamo builds in the streets and the statehouses. More and more Americans are unwilling to tolerate torture and indefinite detention as the only visible end products of the “war on terrorism.” January 11, 2007 marked five years of Guantanamo im-

prisonment for Omar and the hundreds of others. Can their hope and humanity endure another year of imprisonment? Can our sense of law, justice, and democracy withstand the corrosion of executive impunity that long?

Let's not take that chance. Let's shut Guantanamo down. **CT**

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BOMBS AWAY!

BY KENT WILLIAMS

As a movie critic, I get called a lot of names. “Nice try, fatso,” someone once scribbled on a piece of paper and mailed to me after one of my reviews appeared. I guess we hadn’t seen eye to eye on the movie, which is fine, but how did he know I’d put on a few? And why didn’t he include a return address so I could share my thoughts regarding his own struggles with cream puffs? The thing is, of all the words that have been hurled at me over the years, the one that bothers me the most is “negative.” I’m sorry, but I just don’t see myself as a negative person. I see myself as – I’m just going to go ahead and put it out there – a positive person, a glass-half-full kind of guy. And to bring that point home, I’ve assembled a list of movies that everybody, critics and audiences alike, hated, everybody except me.

These are legendarily bad movies, movies that derailed careers and sank studios. That means, of course, that they were made with a certain amount of ambition. You don’t sink a studio without taking on a lot of water. And

for every *Titanic*, which had all the hallmarks of a legendarily bad movie (visionary director, runaway budget, a theme song sung by Celine Dion) but was instead embraced as one of the greatest love stories of all time, there’s a *Cleopatra*, which left Twentieth-Century Fox gasping for air. What did I think of *Titanic*? Thanks for asking! I thought it was...okay. But I’d much rather watch *Cleopatra*, which for all its many flaws, knows how to put on a show. As far as I’m concerned, the costumes alone – “Project Runway” does Egypt by way of Rodeo Drive – are worth the rental fee.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not responding to *Cleopatra* as camp. You’ll find no *Battlefield Earth* in my list, despite its having been legendarily bad and having provided me with two of the most blissful hours of my life. These aren’t movies that are so bad they’re good. They’re movies that, in my opinion, are good, even great, even (in a couple of cases) masterpieces. They’re made by masters, anyway, most of them – Altman, Scorsese, Coppola, Branagh. That’s right, Branagh. I think Kenneth

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So maybe the guy was a bit of a perfectionist, perhaps even slightly megalomaniacal – okay, he rivaled Hitler – but all that matters, in the end, is what he put on the screen

Branagh's promising career as a maestro of high and low art was dealt a tragic blow by the reception to *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, which I regard as one of the neglected masterpieces of the '90s, a flesh-tingling, blood-gurgling, heart-wrenching piece of Grand Guignol that ranks right up there with...well, we'll get to that.

First, I'd like to remind you that this is my own list of legendarily bad movies that are actually quite good. If you don't like my choices, make your own damn list. And don't send me a hand-scribbled note calling me a fatso and pointing out that there's no accounting for some people's taste. Accounting for my taste is exactly what I intend to do. That's the kind of glass-half-full guy I am.

Oh for Heaven's Sake

Critics carved it a new one: "an unqualified disaster," wrote Vincent Canby in *The New York Times*; "a numbing shambles," wrote Pauline Kael in *The New Yorker*; "truly awful," wrote David Denby in *New York magazine*. And audiences, as Sam Goldwyn used to say, stayed away in droves. Having run up a tab of \$44 million – and this was back when \$44 million actually meant something – writer-director Michael Cimino needed to clean up at the box office just to break even. Instead, United Artists went for a swim with the fishes. Yes, folks, it's *Heaven's Gate*, long considered the epitome of that other kind of disaster film.

Having won Best Picture and Best Director Oscars for 1978's *The Deer Hunter*, Cimino was shooting for the

stars – an epic Western to end all epic Westerns, which it nearly did. And he was undoubtedly impossible to work with, as meticulously detailed by studio exec Steven Bach in his fascinating book *Final Cut*. For instance, after six days of shooting, Cimino was five days behind schedule – "takes and retakes and retakes of the retakes," Bach wrote. "And retakes of those." So maybe the guy was a bit of a perfectionist, perhaps even slightly megalomaniacal – okay, he rivaled Hitler – but all that matters, in the end, is what he put on the screen. And what he put on the screen is often stunning, always gorgeous and never boring. Starring the Lincoln-esque Kris Kristofferson as a US marshal in 1892 Wyoming with a range war on his hands, *Heaven's Gate* is about what happened when all those masses huddled around the Statue of Liberty made their way west. (They were slaughtered like cattle.) But what impresses me most about the movie is the way it captured the look and feel of the West as it was turning into the Old West. Vilmos Zsigmond's cinematography is a revelation – realistic, yet transcendent. And the movie itself is like a postcard from another time, full of tidbits that suggest a whole way of life.

A word of caution: The soundtrack is pure mush, the dialogue often drowned out by whatever team of horses happens to be passing by. Luckily, the DVD has a closed-captions option. I'd use it.

Hell, Caesar

Technically speaking, 1963's *Cleopatra* wasn't a critical and commercial disaster. Bosley Crowther of *The New York*

Times called it “stunning and entertaining.” And although it cost \$42 million to produce (\$300 million in today’s currency), it made \$26 million of that back the first year and eventually squeezed out a modest profit. It was also nominated for nine Oscars and won four. But the ones it won were the ones that always go to that year’s studio behemoth – the technical versus the artistic categories. And because the studio system was already teetering on the brink of collapse, *Cleopatra*’s underperformance sent shock waves through Hollywood’s corridors of power. Finally, Judith Crist of The New York Herald-Tribune more adequately represented the views of the critical community when she referred to the film as “at best a major disappointment, at worst an extravagant exercise in tedium.”

Extravagant, yes. Tedious, no – well, not all the time, anyway. Like so many legendarily bad movies, *Cleopatra* was dead in the water before it ever pulled into the harbor. Journalists were gunning for it, and l’affaire de Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, who both left their spouses so that they might torture each other instead, may not have helped. But the movie itself – too long, silly at times – is indeed spectacular, and we’re talking analog spectacle, not digital. Those are real extras sweating in the sun while Elizabeth Taylor’s *Cleopatra* steers her floating barge into Rome. (The woman knew how to make an entrance.) The movie is also what its director, Joseph Mankiewicz, called “a literate spectacle” – not Shakespeare, exactly, but not Troy or Alexander either. It’s surprisingly talky for a sword-

and-sandal epic, but the male leads – Gregory Harrison as Julius Caesar, Burton as Marc Antony – put their English accents to good use.

As for the Queen of the Nile, Miss Taylor was nearly as famous in her time as *Cleopatra* had been in hers, and for the same reason – a willingness to use her feminine wiles to get what she wanted. Instead of gunboat diplomacy, dreamboat diplomacy, and when Taylor’s Cleo flashes her royal cleavage, you understand why men build pyramids. Today, the movie itself seems like ancient history. They don’t make ‘em like this anymore.

Lost in the Desert

Everybody remembers when Elaine May, Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman, three of the most temperamental artists in the history of Hollywood, went looking for comedy in the Muslim world. The result was 1987’s *Ishtar*, a \$50 million Hope-and-Crosby road movie that’s become synonymous with high-priced talent run amok. It probably didn’t help that Beatty and Hoffman split \$11.5 million between them, nor that writer-director May was nearly as finicky as Michael Cimino. (She had an entire sand dune moved, then changed her mind and had it moved back.) But *Ishtar*’s biggest mistake was coming out so soon after *Heaven’s Gate*. People were on the lookout for Hollywood hubris. “A complete disaster,” The New Republic’s Stanley Kauffmann bellowed. “A truly dreadful film,” added Roger Ebert. But it was The Village Voice’s Andrew Sarris who pulled out the big guns. “Never before in the annals of cinematic

Like so many legendarily bad movies, *Cleopatra* was dead in the water before it ever pulled into the harbor

Yes, Beatty and Hoffman are slumming – well, Beatty's slumming, Hoffman is applying his considerable intelligence to playing dumb. Besides, it's fun to watch stars slum; you can see where their talent ends and their charisma begins

endeavor,” Sarris wrote, “has so much been spent on so few for so little.”

Yeah, well who cares how much they spent? Did it raise the ticket price? In my opinion, *Ishtar* works quite well as a Mutt and Jeff comedy about a pair of singer-songwriters who couldn't sing or songwrite their way out of a paper bag. (Think Bill Murray's lounge lizard, only without the talent.) Yes, Beatty and Hoffman are slumming – well, Beatty's slumming, Hoffman is applying his considerable intelligence to playing dumb. Besides, it's fun to watch stars slum; you can see where their talent ends and their charisma begins. Watching the movie recently, I kept being reminded of Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson, who would've killed in this thing, because there's just enough of May's sly wit to give the movie some weight. (My favorite line: “You'd rather have nothing than settle for less.”) Alas, *Ishtar* was her Waterloo; she never signed her name to another feature film. And Columbia Pictures, having lost over \$25 million on the deal, soon got dumped by its parent company, Coca-Cola.

Apparently, some things don't go better with Coke.

Rhymes with 'really'

I'm starting to detect a theme here: Legendarily bad movies are legendarily bad before anyone's actually seen them. They acquire a stink before being allowed to apply their perfume. In the case of *Gigli*, a frisky little Mafia comedy from the director of *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Scent of a Woman* (Martin Brest), that whole Bennifer thing had the media licking its chops, smelling blood.

But the movie itself is pleasantly vulgar. (If you want to hear Jennifer Lopez discuss her nether regions with GPS accuracy, here's your opportunity.) And the stars, though perhaps not quite up to the script's challenges, sparkle like stars are supposed to, Lopez more than Ben Affleck, who may have broken off the engagement for that very reason.

What I like about *Gigli* is that it sticks to its knitting, rarely leaving the apartment where Lopez and Affleck, a pair of Mob enforcers, are holed up with a hostage they're looking after. Other movies would cut to the chase. *Gigli* would rather explore Lopez's nether regions.

Groucho, meet Ingmar

Woody Allen doesn't talk about Ingmar Bergman very much anymore. Nobody talks about Ingmar Bergman very much anymore. But there was a time when it was all anybody would talk about. And Woody, with his Mozartean genius for a gag, aspired to leave the comic realm behind for the cosmic realm. Not just any cosmic realm – he was after the suicidally depressed atmosphere that Bergman had polished to a dark, ebony sheen. Hence, 1978's *Interiors*, which came on the heels of *Annie Hall* and is, in some ways, *Annie Hall* without the la-di-das. Instead of a break-up, a breakdown. Instead of laughs, cries and whispers.

Geraldine Page, in one of her least mannered performances, plays an interior decorator who's turned her three grown daughters – Mary Beth Hurt, Diane Keaton and Kristin Griffith – into glorified knickknacks, placing them ex-

actly where she wants them and dusting them regularly. Then, when her husband leaves her for a woman who actually has blood flowing through her veins, she kills herself.

Bummer. But I don't think Woody has gotten enough credit for how thoroughly he drained his movie of blood. There's no music on the soundtrack, just the ocean's insinuating murmur. And the performances, I believe, are spot-on, especially Maureen Stapleton's as the life force. "It's deep on the surface," Pauline Kael snapped, but the movie's all about surfaces – décor and decorum. It has the mother's exquisite taste, a series of still lifes that add up to death.

Apocalypse Now and then

Back before Sofia Coppola, there was Francis Ford Coppola, one of movie history's more maniacal megalomaniacs. To get the shots he wanted for *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola dragged the entire cast and crew through the Philippine jungle, driving Martin Sheen to a heart attack and managing to make the movie even crazier than the war it was trying to represent. What to do for an encore? Coppola decided to make 1982's *One From the Heart*, a candy-coated valentine shot entirely on the stages of Zoetrope Studios, Coppola's very own dream factory.

Frederic Forrester and Teri Garr play a couple who break up, then make up, on the Fourth of July in that other City of Light, Las Vegas. But they aren't the reason to see *One From the Heart*. Vittorio Storaro (cinematography) and Dean Tavoularis (set design) are. To-

gether, these two created an electronic canvas painted in the colors of pure emotion – jealous greens, passionate reds. Add to that the battered love songs of Tom Waits, sung by Waits and Crystal Gayle, and you have one of cinema's great little oddities, a Gene Kelly ballet without the ballet, just the glistening sweat.

"Coppola seems more fascinated by reflections of the actors than by the actors themselves," Pauline Kael wrote. Touché, but is it always such a bad thing when we leave humming the scenery? Coppola put the "art" back in "artifice" and, for whatever reasons, has never made another one strictly from the heart.

Gotta sing, gotta dance

We don't really associate *The Departed*'s Martin Scorsese and the dearly departed Robert Altman with musicals, but maybe we should. For back in the late '70s and early '80s, when they were given the chance, they both came up with musicals that are far more entertaining than that thing that tried to pass itself off as *Chicago*. Scorsese's *New York, New York*, which starred Robert De Niro and Liza Minnelli as a pair of jazz musicians who couldn't live with or without each other, may have been too dark for people accustomed to *Singin' in the Rain*. Scorsese himself called it "a film noir musical." But I'd call it an old-style musical with new-style dramatics – improv, for instance. De Niro pretty much mops the floor with Minnelli in their scenes together. Then she opens her mouth and blows everybody away with those trumpet blasts of Broadway-

To get the shots he wanted for *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola dragged the entire cast and crew through the Philippine jungle, driving Martin Sheen to a heart attack and managing to make the movie even crazier than the war it was trying to represent

Branagh actually returned his creature feature to its roots in one of the world's very first dark-and-stormy-night novels while also displaying a mad scientist's glee with the cinematic tools at his disposal

baby sound. The movie's about the decline of the big-band era, but it's also about the decline of the old MGM musicals, the ones directed by Vincent Minnelli and starring Judy Garland. No wonder Liza seems right at home.

As for Altman's *Popeye*, which critics railed against (what do they know?), I think it's nothing short of brilliant, the old E.C. Segar comic strip sprung to life. Robin Williams is, if anything, too convincing as Popeye the Sailor Man; he veritably disappears into the role. And Shelley Duvall, as Olive Oyl, gives Al-falfa a run for his money when she breaks into one of Harry Nilsson's faux-naïve songs.

The movie has a Brechtian feel – Threepenny Opera with Bluto substituting for Mack the Knife. And the village of Sweethaven, which clings to the side of a cliff with a real-live ocean lapping at its toes, is a triumph of set design. Today, every movie aspires to be a comic book, a live-action cartoon. Altman pulled it off 26 years ago without a single pixel of CGI.

It's alive

Don't let the title fool you. It's very much *Kenneth Branagh's Frankenstein*, just as *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was very much *Francis Ford Coppola's Dracula*. But Branagh actually returned his creature feature to its roots in one of the world's very first dark-and-stormy-night novels while also displaying a mad scientist's glee with the cinematic tools at his disposal. They don't call them moving pictures for nothing, and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* rarely slows down to ask whether Branagh's Victor

Frankenstein is making the right decisions. Yes, the movie seems a little hastily stitched together, but doesn't that make sense given a monster that was also hastily stitched together? This was Branagh's one and only foray into big-budget, big-studio moviemaking, and he's never fully recovered from the blow.

I want my Mommie

Yes, we all know that *Mommie Dearest* is a camp classic – “No wire hangers!” But have you seen it lately? It's actually quite horrifying, a child-abuse case turned into a Grimm's Fairy Tale and made all the more disturbing by the fact that the evil stepmother was a screen legend. Faye Dunaway didn't just impersonate Joan Crawford, she dug her up, plugged a pair of electrodes into her skull and then jumped into her skin. And the performance is simply mesmerizing; you can't take your eyes off her Kabuki face. Crawford may have been driven insane by the old studio system, its demand for immaculate beauty. And Dunaway herself, having conquered Hollywood with *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Chinatown* and *Network*, was more or less laughed out of town.

“The trashiest kind of trash,” David Sterritt called *Mommie Dearest* in *The Christian Science Monitor*. To which I can only reply...

Nice try, fatso.

CT

This article originally appeared in Isthmus, the alternative weekly newspaper at Madison, Wisconsin (www.thedailypage.com), for which Williams is a staff writer.

IN THE SPIRIT OF NERO

BY DAVID EDWARDS & DAVID CROMWELL

“There ain’t no time to wonder why Whoopee! We’re all gonna die.”

– ‘Feel Like I’m Fixin’ To Die’ Rag, Country Joe and The Fish, 1967)

The science is now clear: humanity is bringing disaster to our planet. On February 3, the Independent noted that the latest scientific assessment by the prestigious UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provides “humanity’s loudest warning yet of the catastrophe that is threatening to overtake us”. “No more excuses,” the Guardian’s editorial intoned on the same day.

The irony is bitter indeed. While the Guardian’s front page was packed with doom-laden warnings, the centre spread consisted of a two-page, full-colour advert for Renault cars: “Everything is sport.” For good measure, the cover story of the Travel supplement promoted holidays to New York.

A classic double-page was also to be found at the heart of the Independent: graphs of perilously rising



temperatures, text explaining the catastrophic impacts, photographs of climate-related disasters around the world. And also, bottom left on the same page, a large advert for Halfords “car essentials” and, bottom right, an American Airlines advert for reduced-fare flights (just £199!) to New York (see above)

The rest of the Independent – like all other newspapers – was crammed with the usual inducements to indulge in unrestrained consumerism: Renault, Audi and Hyundai cars, a

MEDIA HYPOCRISY

How ironic, postmodern, unsentimental and courageous to describe mass death as "a window of opportunity"

multitude of hotel breaks, hi-tech electronic gadgets, credit card loans, furniture and yet more 'cheap' flights.

The message? We're rapidly heading for disaster and must take decisive action now. Meanwhile, we must continue accelerating along the same path that is the cause of this disaster. Never has the structural conflict of interest at the very heart of the corporate media been more painfully exposed.



The beauty of the flames

The cover story of the Independent on Sunday's Review supplement the following day (February 4) was almost beyond belief. The words on the cover ran (see left):

"Time is running out... Ski resorts are melting... Paradise islands are vanishing... So what are you waiting for?"

"30 places you need to visit while you still can – A 64-page Travel Special..."

It is worth quoting at length from the article. Its author, Marcus Fairs, wrote: "I am changing my travel plans this year. Alarmed by global warming, shocked by the imminent mass extinction of species and distraught at the environmental damage wreaked by mass tourism, I have decided to act before it is too late. Yes, carbon-neutral travel can wait. I'm off to see polar bears, tigers and low-lying Pacific atolls while they're still there... In the spirit of Nero – the Roman emperor who sang to the beauty of the flames while Rome burned to the

ground – we are determined to enjoy the final days of our beautiful Earth. We are aware that mass tourism damages the very things we are going to see, but this only increases our urgency. We are aware that we will soon have to act more sustainably, which gives us all the more reason to be irresponsible while we still can.

"Not for us the angsty despair of the eco-worriers, nor the stay-home moralising of the greenhouse gasbags. For we are the travel Neroists, and we have spotted a window of opportunity." (Marcus Fairs, 'Travel special: Roman holidays,' Independent on Sunday, February 4, 2007)

In his new book, *Affluenza*, psychologist Oliver James notes "an addiction to irony" in modern society: "saying one thing when another is meant in order to establish a disconnection between the speaker and his listener, or between the speaker and that which is being spoken. Or even between the speaker and himself." (James, *Affluenza*, Vermillion, 2007, p.284)

How ironic, postmodern, unsentimental and courageous to describe mass death as "a window of opportunity".

The World Health Organization has estimated that global warming already contributes to more than 150,000 deaths and 5 million illnesses each year – a toll that could double by 2030.

But in reality, beneath the sham of postmodern bravura, Fairs is a humble conformist serving his paper's advertisers in the usual way. We wrote

to Fairs's editor at the Independent, Tim Lewis: "Given this extraordinary and rising level of suffering, what is the moral justification for today's front cover? Are you not in fact subordinating human welfare to short-term profit by publishing this piece? Fairs links to many travel companies in his article – did the Independent on Sunday receive payment for these mentions?"

We have received no reply.

In his article, Fairs presented the holiday industry perspective: "Travel is often unfairly demonised by the eco-lobby: flying accounts for around 3 per cent of global CO₂ [carbon dioxide] emissions (compared to 20 per cent for domestic heating and a similar amount for road transport). According to the Carbon Trust, of the 11 tonnes of CO₂ emitted each year by the average person in the UK, just 0.68 tonnes comes from flying – whereas a full tonne derives from the manufacture and transport of our clothing.

'Demanding that people stop flying is not the solution to all our problems,' says Responsibletravel.com's [Justin] Francis, 'especially when many developing countries rely on responsible tourism as a significant source of income to protect and conserve their environment.'

It is natural for a corporate journalist to report the corporate view. But Fairs neglected to cite any of the development experts and climate scientists who dismiss these arguments as toxic, cynical nonsense – as just one more unsubtle attempt to justify

inaction in defence of profits.

"We know what needs to be done"

On the Independent's leader pages, somewhat removed from the money-grubbing cynicism of the travel sections, there is at least the illusion of sensible analysis. "We", proclaimed its editors, "know what needs to be done." Was this to be a call to rein in corporate power? To dismantle 'free trade' treaties and institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation? To replace them with democratic institutions that might serve all of humanity and the planet we share?

Of course not. The paper, owned by billionaire Sir Anthony O'Reilly, instead told readers that solutions to the impending nightmare must accord with prevailing elite wisdom: that 'greener' economic growth will do the trick, that the market can save the planet. All "we" need do is look on while clever economists fix the price of carbon and factor it into the cost of products and services, and while politicians police the framework:

"There must be a global treaty on reducing emissions that will put a high price on carbon emissions and it must be enforced through taxation and fines." (Leader, 'Now it is up to the world's political leaders to deliver more than hot air,' The Independent, February 3, 2007)

Not a word here about the need to base any global treaty on equal per capita emission rights for all people, rich or poor (the Global Commons

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MEDIA HYPOCRISY

This is all pretty much business-as-usual with a few technofixes and superficial green sheen thrown in

Institute's proposal of 'contraction and convergence': see www.gci.org.uk).

Meanwhile, the Financial Times, the house paper of the business community, had a similar evangelical message of tweaking the capitalist model:

"The way forward is a framework that compensates developing countries for the costs they bear, but also encourages the most efficient possible use of energy resources. The buying of rights to emit by high-income countries from developing countries is one way to achieve this result. A common tax regime, with accompanying cross-border transfers, would be another.

"The crucial requirements, however, are three: a clear and predictable price for carbon emissions across the world; much increased investment in research and development in renewables, nuclear power and carbon capture and storage; and arrangements for transfer of best technology across the globe." (Leader, 'Urgent need for action on climate change. We need a clear and predictable worldwide price for carbon,' Financial Times, February 3, 2007)

Again, this is all pretty much business-as-usual with a few technofixes and superficial green sheen thrown in. As for those other stalwarts of the British 'quality press', neither The Times nor the Daily Telegraph deemed the IPCC report worth mentioning in their leader columns.

Back at the Independent, its leader

writer had one final killer observation:

"The problem is not one of information, but action."

Yes, this corporate newspaper really would have us believe that all relevant information about the climate disaster is freely available in the public domain.

This is easily put to the test. Where are the discussions about the corporate stranglehold on economics, politics, culture and society? About the fanatical, age-old Western determination to control global resources and markets? About the West's repeated crushing of regional self-development in Latin America, southeast Asia and elsewhere? About the psychopathic corporate imperative to yield, at any cost, shareholder dividends for rich investors? And about the patently unsustainable business model of endless economic 'growth'?

That none of this is up for serious discussion – even as the planet teeters on the brink of the greatest mass extinction since the end of the Permian era, 251 million years ago – is actually no surprise at all. **CT**

David Edwards and David Cromwell are co-editors of the of the London-based media watchdog, Medialens (www.medialens.org).

*Their book, *Guardians of Power: The Myth Of The Liberal Media*, was published last year by Pluto Books*

THEY'VE SENT HELBIG AFTER ME

BY FELICITY ARBUTHNOT

Roger Helbig is a man with an unhealthy obsession: he believes that depleted uranium (DU) waste from the nuclear fuel cycle, which is used in munitions and bullets – is safe.

I received an unsolicited email from him, entitled 'The Real Doug Rokke' in response to an article I had written for The Brussels Tribunal.

It read: "I see that you have been taken in by Doug Rokke, who really does not know much about anything, let alone depleted uranium. It is sad that a PhD has so little real knowledge. I also see you claim to be a journalist.

"What newspapers, radio stations or TV stations have you actually worked for, or are you like Bob Nichols, a self-described journalist with no actual journalistic experience?"

His tirade continued: "Rokke's military records and part of his PhD thesis are attached.

"You will note he has no real expertise in depleted uranium and his claims about the Middle East are pure fantasy, yet you inflame the Arab street with

them. You ought to learn more about what is before telling the world all about it."

I had written in the article: "Depleted uranium from shells fired by British and American forces during the Balkan wars has found its way into the food chain and has been detected amongst the civilian populations of Kosovo and Bosnia.

"A study of the local population in three locations in the two Balkan regions has found samples of the highly radioactive particles in the urine of all those tested."

Helbig had highlighted the excerpt, commenting: "This is pure bullshit and you know it. Where are the actual test results? I presume you don't choose to read the United Nations Environmental Programme report – it is only about 300 pages, well documented instead of scientific myth!"

Lieutenant Colonel Roger Helbig, USAF, Rtd (it appears) is one of a small Pentagon-inspired group devoted to denigrating and undermining the efforts of those drawing attention to the

"This is pure bullshit and you know it. Where are the actual test results? I presume you don't choose to read the United Nations Environmental Programme report – it is only about 300 pages, well documented instead of scientific myth!"

"Individuals on web sites throughout the United States have complained about the abusive and aggressive actions of an Air Force Lieut. Colonel named Roger Helbig"

dangers of DU, which three UN Sub-Committees have designated a weapon of mass destruction.

Rokke is just the latest in a long line of Helbig targets. Journalist Bob Nichols, Project Censored award winner for his DU coverage, writes, "Individuals on web sites throughout the United States have complained about the abusive and aggressive actions of an Air Force Lieut. Colonel named Roger Helbig."

David Lindorff, another award winner and the (UK) Observer's David Rose, have also suffered a barrage of abuse for stories exposing the dangers of DU, which poisons the environment, thus entire food chain regionally where used, for four-and-a-half billion years.

Nichols cites Helbig "attacking hundreds of sites and harassing web moderators."

Informative DU sites (such as www.pandoraproject@yahoo.com and www.notinkansas.us – the latter's meticulously researched alerts included the chilling warning of US military in Iraq regarding bathing in shower water taken from Tigris river: "GI's Beware Radioactive Showers") are also victims.

Researcher, John Ervin, posted on www.apfn.net: "They've already sent Lt. Colonel Roger Helbig after me."

Leuren Moret, President of Scientists for Indigenous Peoples and City of Berkeley (Ca) Environmental Commissioner states: "Helbig has been harassing me nonstop for two to three years."

Moret travels the world warning on the dangers of DU, working with a group of independent scientists (www.radiation.org) and submitted a

paper on DU to a UN Sub-Committee, one of the ones which led to DUs designation as a weapon of mass destruction.

The picture Helbig paints of his latest target Rokke is unrecognisable from the truth.

Major (Dr) Doug Rokke, Former Director of the US Army Depleted Uranium Project (www.traprockpeace.org), principal author of the Pentagon regulations and procedural guidelines (US Army Regulation 700-48 And US Army PAM 700-48) on the dangers and handling of DU affected areas: tanks, structures, terrain, equipment and personnel, civilian and military.

Horrified by what he found

Rokke, whose team led the (impossible) clean up in Kuwait in 1991 after the first Gulf War, was so horrified by what he found, he finally spoke out – at cost. Sick from DU poisoning himself, he has suffered ongoing 'physical, psychological and economic threats' from Helbig and other US government representatives since.

Rokke has crucial, credible, hands-on knowledge, thus, writes David Lindorff, the effort to discredit him, label him 'a fraud', demote him to 'Lt.' by Helbig, has been vicious and tenacious.

This is the same Doug Rokke whose Army evaluation report, dated July 30th 1994, cites the then Captain Rokke as being Project Director and primary technical expert and specialist adviser to US Army major commands, the US Army Chemical School and contractors during training, development and test implementation.

In 1995 he was cited for a 'meritorious service' medal, for work on DU. He left the army when none of his health warnings reached the troops.

Rokke and another former Pentagon advisor, Dr Asav Durakovic, whose CV and list of peer reviewed papers runs to 52 pages, Canadian expert Professor Hari Sharma (who wrote to NATO and world leaders of the dangers of DU), Dr Garth Nicholson and others have demanded appropriate testing and treatment of all affected – soldiers and civilians – and rigorous DU clean up, where used or tested “as already required by the US Department of Defence regulations...,” states Rokke.

The polluter pays. But the cost would be stratospheric; so Helbig's group stalks the internet to insult and intimidate.

“The use of uranium munitions is an act of terror,” Rokke says. In context, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 'self initiated' a report for the British government on DU shortly after the 1991 war.

Half million cancer deaths

If 50 tonnes of the residual DU dust remained, they estimated that there would be in excess of half a million cancer deaths in the region by the year 2000. The Pentagon admits to 325 tonnes remaining and other estimates are as high as 900 tonnes. In 2003 a further two thousand tonne DU burden has been admitted to.

Iraq and the region's cancers have become a tragedy equalling Chernobyl. Oddly, when the US/UK military allowed the looting of every Iraqi State

building, all medical records of this unique war crime were destroyed.

Helbig is exercised by a memo from Los Alamos National Laboratories, New Mexico, from a Lt. Colonel Larson to a Major Ziehman. It is dated the day after the 1991 onslaught on Iraq ended (1st March 1991.)

Headed 'The Effectiveness of Depleted Uranium Penetrators', it reads: “There is a relatively small amount of lethality data for uranium penetrators... The recent war has likely multiplied the DU rounds fired at targets by orders of magnitude...”

“There has been and continues to be a concern regarding the impact of DU on the environment. Therefore, if no one makes a case for the effectiveness of DU on the battlefield, DU rounds may become politically unacceptable and thus, be deleted from the arsenal.”

Thus, “we should assure their future existence,” otherwise may stand to lose them. He continues, “I believe we should keep this sensitive issue in mind, when, after action, reports are written.” US tanks damaged by DU rounds in 1991 were taken to a nuclear decontamination plant at Barnwell, North Carolina, reportedly constructed the previous year solely for this purpose. Those beyond decontamination were buried in specially licensed landfill sites.

In June 1995 the US Army Environmental Policy Institute wrote of DU: “DU is a radioactive waste and therefore should be deposited in a licensed repository.” The poisoned chalice of breaking the news that Kuwait had been turned in to an unlicensed one, fell to the luckless British Ambassador.

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"At every level, investigation into illness, birth defects, contamination has been blocked and bedeviled by ... a pervasive myopia which sees lack of evidence as proof"

Helbig's email cites the United Nations Environment Agency Report. There were two UNEP Reports on Balkans contamination. The first was cut – under alleged US/UK pressure – from 72 pages, to two.

An impeccable source on the second, to which Helbig refers, stated that in spite of considerable obstacles placed in their way, a list of the most contaminated sites to sample was compiled. On arrival, the multinational forces excluded visits to those sites.

As Professor Malcolm Hooper, Emeritus Professor of Medicinal Chemistry at Sunderland University (UK) writes in his article "Most Toxic War in Western Military History," regarding Iraq in 1991: "at every level, investigation into illness, birth defects, contamination has been blocked and bedeviled by ... a pervasive myopia which sees lack of evidence as proof."

Last September, Lieutenant Colonel Helbig, of Richardson, California, was in court. Complex, inter-connected cases, heard also in June and July, due to resume in December, involve Helbig's

neighbour, Jamahl Feres, of Syrian origin and his Swiss wife Katherine.

They allege suffering three years of harassment including the last year, in which Helbig covered all windows in his house which faced theirs, with Israeli flags. Leuren Moret and Bob Nichol will be witnesses for the Feres's.

It now transpires that Helbig (whose scorn for on-line journalists and journals is boundless) has posted varying rants on www.inthesetimes.com in the name of 'Natalie.'

You have been warned.

CT

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

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BUSH & CHENEY: ISRAEL'S KEVORKIAN

BY RAY McGOVERN

President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney are unwittingly playing Dr. Jack Kevorkian in helping the state of Israel commit suicide. For this is the inevitable consequence of the planned air and missile attack on Iran. The pock-marked, littered landscape in Iraq, Lebanon, and Afghanistan and the endless applicant queues at al-Qaeda and other terrorist recruiting stations testify eloquently to the unintended consequences of myopic policymakers in Washington and Tel Aviv.

Mesmerized. Sadly, this is the best word to describe those of us awake to the inexorable march of folly to war with Iran and the growing danger to Israel's security, especially over the medium and long term. An American and/or Israeli attack on Iran will let slip the dogs of war. Those dogs never went to obedience school. They will not be denied their chance to bite, and Israel's arsenal of nuclear weapons will be powerless to muzzle them.

In my view, not since 1948 has the very existence of Israel hung so much in

the balance. Can Bush/Cheney and the Israeli leaders not see it? Pity that no one seems to have read our first president's warning on the noxious effects of entangling alliances.

The supreme irony is that in their fervor to help, as well as use, Israel, Bush and Cheney seem blissfully unaware that they are leading it down a garden path and off a cliff.

Provoke and pre-empt

Whether it is putting the kibosh on direct talks with Iran or between Israel and Syria, the influence and motives of the vice president are more transparent than those of Bush. Sure, Cheney told CNN's Wolf Blitzer recently that the administration's Iraq policy would be "an enormous success story," but do not believe those who dismiss Cheney as "delusional." He and his "neo-conservative" friends are crazy like a fox. They have been pushing for confrontation with Iran for many years, and saw the invasion of Iraq in that context. Alluding to recent U.S. military moves, author Robert Dreyfuss rightly de-

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CONFRONTING IRAN

The vice president can play Bush like a violin. But what strings is he using here? Where is the resonance?

scribes the neo-cons as “crossing their fingers in the hope that Iran will respond provocatively, making what is now a low-grade cold war inexorably heat up.”

But what about the president? How to explain his fixation with fixing Iran’s wagon? Cheney’s influence over Bush has been shown to be considerable ever since the one-man search committee for the 2000 vice presidential candidate picked Cheney. The vice president can play Bush like a violin. But what strings is he using here? Where is the resonance?

Impressionable sort

Experience has shown the president to be an impressionable sort with a roulette penchant for putting great premium on initial impressions and latching onto people believed to be kindred souls – be it Russian President Vladimir Putin (trust at first sight), hail-fellow-well-met CIA director George Tenet, or oozing-testosterone-from-every-pore former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Of particular concern was his relationship with Sharon. Retired Gen. Brent Scowcroft, a master of discretion with the media, saw fit to tell London’s Financial Times two and a half years ago that Sharon had Bush “mesmerized” and “wrapped around his little finger.”

As chair of the prestigious President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board under George W. Bush and national security adviser to his father, Scowcroft was uniquely positioned to know – and to draw comparisons. He was summarily fired after making the comments about

Sharon and is now persona non grata at the White House.

George W. Bush first met Sharon in 1998, when the Texas governor was taken on a tour of the Middle East by Matthew Brooks, then executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition. Sharon was foreign minister and took Bush on a helicopter tour over the Israeli occupied territories. An Aug. 3, 2006 McClatchy wire story by Ron Hutcheson quotes Matthew Brooks:

“If there’s a starting point for George W. Bush’s attachment to Israel, it’s the day in late 1998, when he stood on a hilltop where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, and, with eyes brimming with tears, read aloud from his favorite hymn, ‘Amazing Grace.’ He was very emotional. It was a tear-filled experience. He brought Israel back home with him in his heart. I think he came away profoundly moved.”

Bush made gratuitous but revealing reference to that trip at the first meeting of his National Security Council (NSC) on Jan. 30, 2001. After announcing he would abandon the decades-long role of honest broker between Israelis and Palestinians and would tilt pronouncedly toward Israel, Bush said he would let Sharon resolve the dispute however he saw fit. At that point he brought up his trip to Israel with the Republican Jewish Coalition and the flight over Palestinian camps, but there was no sense of concern for the lot of the Palestinians. In his book, *A Pretext for War*, James Bamford quotes Bush: “Looked real bad down there,” he said with a frown. Then he said it was time to end America’s efforts in the region. “I

don't see much we can do over there at this point," he said.

So much for the Sermon on the Mount. The version I read puts a premium on actively working for justice. There is no suggestion that tears suffice.

Then-Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill, who was at the NSC meeting, reported that Colin Powell, the newly minted but nominal secretary of state, was taken completely by surprise at this nonchalant jettisoning of long-standing policy. Powell demurred, warning that this would unleash Sharon and "the consequences could be dire, especially for the Palestinians." But according to O'Neill, Bush just shrugged, saying, "Sometimes a show of strength by one side can really clarify things." O'Neill says that Powell seemed "startled." It is a safe bet that the vice president was in no way startled.

A similar account reflecting Bush's compassion deficit disorder leaps from the pages of Ron Susskind's book, *The One Percent Doctrine*. Crown Prince Abdullah, Saudi Arabia's de facto leader was in high dudgeon in April 2002 when he arrived in Crawford to take issue with Bush's decision to tilt toward Israel and jettison the long-standing American role of honest broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With Bush's freshly bestowed "man-of-peace" epithet for Sharon still ringing in Abdullah's ear, he began by insisting that before a word was spoken the president and his aides watch a 15-minute video the prince had brought of mayhem on the West Bank, of American-made tanks, bloodied and dead children, screaming mothers. Then, still wordless, they all filed into

another room where the Saudis proceeded to make specific demands, but Bush appeared distracted and was non-responsive. After a few minutes, the president turned to Abdullah and said, "Let's go for a drive. Just you and me. I'll show you the ranch."

Bush was unprepared

Bush was so obviously unprepared to discuss substance with his Saudi guests that some of the president's aides checked into what had happened. The briefing packet for the president had been diverted to Cheney's office. Bush never got it, so he was totally unaware of what the Saudis hoped to accomplish in making the hajj to Crawford. (There is little doubt that this has been a common experience over the past six years and that there are, in effect, two "deciders" in the White House, one of them controlling the paper flow.)

Not that Bush was starved for background briefings. Indeed, he showed a preference to get them from Prime Minister Sharon who, with his senior military aide, Gen. Yoav Galant, briefed the president both in Crawford (in 2005) and the Oval Office (in 2003) on Iran's "nuclear weapons program." Sorry if I find that odd. That used to be our job at CIA. I'll bet Sharon and Galant packed a bigger punch.

There is, no doubt, more at play here regarding Bush's attitude and behavior regarding Israel and Palestine. One need not be a psychologist to see ample evidence of oedipal tendencies. It is no secret that the president has been privately critical of what he perceives to be his father's mistakes. Susskind notes,

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CONFRONTING IRAN

Israeli leaders risk much if they take reassurance from the president's rhetoric, particularly vis-à-vis Iran

for example, that Bush defended his tilt toward Israel by telling an old foreign policy hand, "I'm not going to be supportive of my father and all his Arab buddies!" And it seems certain that Ariel Sharon gave the young Bush an earful about the efforts of James Baker, his father's secretary of state, to do the unthinkable; i.e. e., crank Arab grievances into deals he tried to broker between Israel and the Palestinians. It seems clear that this is one reason the Baker-Hamilton report was dead on arrival.

With friends like these...

George W. Bush may have the best of intentions in his zeal to defend Israel, but he and Cheney have the most myopic of policies. Israeli leaders risk much if they take reassurance from the president's rhetoric, particularly vis-à-vis Iran.

I am constantly amazed to find, as I speak around the country, that the vast majority of educated Americans believe we have a defense treaty with Israel. We don't, but one can readily see how it is they are misled. Listen to the president exactly two years ago:

"Clearly, if I was the leader of Israel and I'd listened to some of the statements by the Iranian ayatollahs that regarded the security of my country, I'd be concerned about Iran having a nu-

clear weapon as well. And, in that Israel is our ally (sic) – and in that we've made a very strong commitment to support Israel – we will support Israel if her security is threatened."

We do no favors for Israeli leaders in giving them the impression they have carte blanche in their neighborhood – and especially vis-à-vis Iran, and that we will bail them out, no matter what. Have they learned nothing from the recent past? Far from enhancing Israel's security, the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Washington's encouragement of Israel's feckless attack on Lebanon last summer resulted in more breeding ground for terrorist activity against Israel. This will seem child's play compared to what would be in store, should the US and/or Israel bomb Iran.

Bottom line: there is a growing threat to Israel from suicide bombers. The most dangerous two work in the White House. **CT**

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years and is on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

A previous version of this article appeared at TomPaine.com

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FULL SPECTRUM DOMINANCE

BY WILLIAM BLUM

It is not often that the empire is put in the position of one its victims, in fear of the military and technical prowess of another country, forced to talk of peace and cooperation, just as Iraq and others, hoping to put off an American attack, were forced to do over the years; just as Iran now. No, China is not about to attack the United States, but the Chinese shutdown of a satellite (an old weather satellite of theirs) in space on January 11, has made a US attack on China much more dangerous and much less likely; it's made the empire's leaders realize that they don't have total power to make any and all other nations do their bidding.

Here's how the gentlemen of the Pentagon have sounded in the recent past on the subject of space.

"We will engage terrestrial targets someday – ships, airplanes, land targets – from space. ... We're going to fight in space. We're going to fight from space and we're going to fight into space." – General Joseph Ashy, Commander-in-Chief of the U.S.

Space Command, 1996^[1]

"With regard to space dominance, we have it, we like it, and we're going to keep it." – Keith R. Hall, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Space and Director of the National Reconnaissance Office, 1997^[2]

"US Space Command – dominating the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investment. Integrating Space Forces into warfighting capabilities across the full spectrum of conflict. ... During the early portion of the 21st century, space power will also evolve into a separate and equal medium of warfare. ... The emerging synergy of space superiority with land, sea, and air superiority will lead to Full Spectrum Dominance. ... Development of ballistic missile defenses using space systems and planning for precision strikes from space offers a counter to the worldwide proliferation of WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. ... Space is a region with increasing commercial, civil, international, and military interests and investments.

"We will engage terrestrial targets someday – ships, airplanes, land targets – from space. ... We're going to fight in space. We're going to fight from space and we're going to fight into space"

Deputy spokesman Tom Casey stated, presumably without chuckling: "We certainly are concerned by any effort, by any nation that would be geared towards developing weapons or other military activities in space"

The threat to these vital systems is also increasing. ... Control of Space is the ability to assure access to space, freedom of operations within the space medium, and an ability to deny others the use of space, if required." – "United States Space Command: Vision for 2020", 1997^[3]

"Space represents a fundamentally new and better way to apply military force" – U.S. Strategic Command, 2004^[4]

And now along comes China, with the ability to make all this proud talk look somewhat foolish. At a State Department press briefing a week after the shutdown, the department's deputy spokesman Tom Casey stated, presumably without chuckling: "We certainly are concerned by any effort, by any nation that would be geared towards developing weapons or other military activities in space. ... We don't want to see a situation where there is any militarization of space." He spoke of the "peaceful use of space", and was concerned about the threat to "modern life as we know it", because "countries throughout the world are dependant on space based technologies, weather satellites, communications satellites and other devices".

A reporter asked: "Has the United States conducted such a test destroying a satellite in space?"

Yes, said Casey, in 1985. But that was different because "there was a Cold War that was being engaged in between the United States and the Soviet Union" and there were much fewer satellites moving about space.^[5]

Cong. Terry Everett, senior Republican on the House armed services subcommittee on strategic forces, said China's test "raises serious concerns about the vulnerability of our space-based assets. ... We depend on satellites for a host of military and commercial uses, from navigation to ATM transactions."^[6]

Even prior to the Chinese test, the Washington Post pointed out: "For a U.S. military increasingly dependent on sophisticated satellites for communicating, gathering intelligence and guiding missiles, the possibility that those space-based systems could come under attack has become a growing worry. ... The administration insists that there is no arms race in space, although the United States is the only nation that opposed a recent United Nations call for talks on keeping weapons out of space. ... Although the 1967 U.N. Outer Space Treaty, signed by the United States, allows only peaceful uses of space, some believe that the United States is moving toward some level of weaponization, especially related to a missile defense system."^[7]

Tom Casey, the State Department spokesperson, tried his best to give the impression that the United States has no idea why China would do such a thing – "We would like to see and understand and know more about what they're really trying to accomplish here." ... "exactly what their intentions are" ... "questions that arise about what Chinese intentions are" ... "not only the nature of what they've done, but the purpose and in-

tent”^[8]

But the United States can well imagine what China’s intention was. The Chinese were responding to the efforts of the Bush administration, and the Clinton administration before them, to establish and maintain US military supremacy in space and to use that supremacy as a threatening, or actual, weapon. Beijing wished to put Washington on notice that in any future conflict with China the United States will not be dealing with Iraq or Afghanistan, or Yugoslavia, Panama or Grenada.

“But what did anyone expect?” asks Lawrence Martin, columnist for The Globe and Mail of Canada. “For several years, China, Canada, and virtually every country in the world have been urging the United States to enter into an arms-control treaty for outer space. Leave the heavens in peace, for god’s sake. Come together and work something out. It’s called collective security. ... Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney showed no interest in a space treaty. Their national space policy is essentially hegemony in the heavens. They oppose the development of new legal regimes or other measures that restrict their designs. A UN resolution to prevent an arms race in space was supported by 151 countries with zero opposed. The U.S. abstained. It wants strategic control.”^[9]

The ideology of the ruling class in any society is one that tries to depict the existing social order as “natural”

In 1972 I traveled by land from San

Francisco to Chile, to observe and report on Salvador Allende’s “socialist experiment”. One of the lasting impressions of my journey through Latin America is of the strict class order of the societies I visited. There are probably very few places in the world where the dividing lines between the upper and middle classes on the one hand and the lower class on the other are more distinct and emotionally clung to, including Great Britain.

In the Chilean capital of Santiago I went to look at a room in a house advertised by a woman. Because I was American she assumed that I was anti-Allende, the same assumption she’d have made if I had been European, for she wanted to believe that only “Indians”, only poor dumb indígenas and their ilk, supported the government. She was pleased by the prospect of an American living in her home and was concerned that he might be getting the wrong impression about her country.

“All this chaos,” she assured me, “it’s not normal, it’s not Chile”. When I relieved her of her misconception about me she was visibly confused and hurt, and I was a little uncomfortable as well, as if I had betrayed her trust. I made my departure quickly.

There’s the classic Latin American story of the servant of a family of the oligarchy. He bought steak for his patrón’s dog, but his own family ate scraps. He took the dog to the vet, but couldn’t take his own children to a doctor. And complained not. In Chile, under Allende, there was a terribly nagging fear amongst the privileged classes that servants no longer

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I wonder what such people think of George "I am the decider" Bush and his repeated use of "signing statements", which effectively means a law is what he says it is, no more, no less

knew their place. (In Sweden, for some years now, they have been able to examine children of a certain age – their height, weight, and various health measurements – and are then not able to tell which social class the child is from; they have ended class warfare against children.)

In the 1980s, in Central America, servants rose up in much of the region against their betters, the latter of course being unconditionally supported with Yankee money, Yankee arms, even Yankee lives. At the end of that decade the New York Times offered some snapshots of El Salvador:

"Over canapes served by hovering waiters at a party, a guest said she was convinced that God had created two distinct classes of people: the rich and people to serve them. She described herself as charitable for allowing the poor to work as her servants. "It's the best you can do," she said. The woman's outspokenness was unusual, but her attitude is shared by a large segment of the Salvadoran upper class.

"The separation between classes is so rigid that even small expressions of kindness across the divide are viewed with suspicion. When an American, visiting an ice cream store, remarked that he was shopping for a birthday party for his maid's child, other store patrons immediately stopped talking and began staring at the American. Finally, an astonished woman in the check-out line spoke out. "You must be kidding," she said.^[10]

The same polarization is taking place now in Venezuela as Hugo

Chávez attempts to build a more egalitarian society. The Associated Press (January 29, 2007) recently presented some snapshots from Caracas: A man of European parents says that at his son's private Jewish school some parents are talking about how and when to leave the country. The man wants a passport for his 10-year-old son in case they need to leave for good. "I think we're headed toward totalitarianism."

A middle-class retiree grimaces at what she sees coming: "Within one year, complete communism. ... What he's forming is a dictatorship." The fact that Chávez is himself part indígena and part black, and looks it, can well add to their animosity towards the man.

I wonder what such people think of George "I am the decider" Bush and his repeated use of "signing statements", which effectively means a law is what he says it is, no more, no less; his Patriot Act, and his various assaults on the principle of habeas corpus, to name but a few of the scary practices of his authoritarian rule.

Chuck Kaufman, National Co-Coordinator of the Washington-based Nicaragua Network, was part of a group which visited Venezuela last fall. Following is part of his report:

"Venezuela is politically polarized. We witnessed the extremes of this during a dinner with lawyer and author Eva Golinger. Some very drunk opposition supporters recognized Golinger as author of *The Chávez Code* and a strong Chavez partisan. Some of them surrounded our table

and began screaming at Golinger and the delegation, calling us “assassins” “Cubans,” and “Argentines.”

“The verbal abuse went on for long minutes until waiters ejected the most out-of-control anti-Chávez woman. We were later told that she worked in the Attorney General’s office, highlighting one of the many contradictions arising from the fact that Chávez’ Bolivarian revolution came into power democratically through the ballot box rather than by force of arms.

“Armed revolutions generally sweep opponents out of government jobs and places of influence such as the media, but in Venezuela many in the opposition are still in the civil service and most of the media is virulently anti-Chávez.”^[11]

I admire Hugo Chávez and what he’s trying to do in Venezuela, but I wish he wouldn’t go out of his way to taunt the Bush administration, as he does so frequently. Doesn’t he know that he’s dealing with a bunch of homicidal maniacs? Literally. Someone please tell him to cool it or he will endanger his social revolution.

Liberalism’s best and brightest

A report in the Washington Post, headlined “Soldier’s Death Strengthens Senators’ Antiwar Resolve”, informs us that Senators Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and John Kerry (D-Mass.) have been rather upset upon learning of the death in Iraq of an Army Captain whom they met on a visit to the country in December, and who made a

strong impression upon them. Dodd has been “radicalized”, the story says, and Kerry has been “energized” in his opposition to the war.

Why, it must be asked, does it take the death of someone they met by chance to fire up their anti-war sentiments? Many millions of Americans, and many millions more around the world, have protested the war vehemently and passionately without having met any of the war’s victims. What do these protestors have inside of them that so many members of Congress seem to lack?

“This was the kind of person you don’t forget,” said Dodd. “You mention the number dead, 3,000, the 22,000 wounded, and you almost see the eyes glaze over. But you talk about an individual like this, who was doing his job, a hell of a job, but was also willing to talk about what was wrong, it’s a way to really bring it to life, to connect.”^[12]

Dear reader, is it the same for you? Do your eyes glaze over when you read or hear about the dead and wounded of Iraq?

Neither senator has apparently been “energized” enough to call for the immediate withdrawal of American forces from Iraq. That would be too “radical”.

This gap – emotionally and intellectually – between members of Congress and normal human beings has been with us for ages of course. The anti-Vietnam War movement burst out of the starting gate back in August 1964, with hundreds of people demonstrating in New York. Many of

I admire Hugo Chávez and what he’s trying to do in Venezuela, but I wish he wouldn’t go out of his way to taunt the Bush administration, as he does so frequently. Doesn’t he know that he’s dealing with a bunch of homicidal maniacs? Literally

We must lower the minimum wage. And thus enjoy less unemployment, less social unrest. Indeed, if we lower the minimum wage to zero, particularly for poor blacks ... think of it! ... No unemployment at all! Hardly any social unrest! In fact – dare I say it? – What if we did away with wages altogether?

these early dissenters took apart and critically examined the administration's statements about the war's origin, its current situation, and its rosy picture of the future. They found continuous omission, contradiction, and duplicity, became quickly and wholly cynical, and called for immediate and unconditional withdrawal. This was a state of intellect and principle it took members of Congress – and then only a minority – until the 1970s to reach. The same can be said of the mass media. And even then – even today – our political and media elite viewed Vietnam only as a “mistake”; i.e., it was “the wrong way” to fight communism, not that the United States should not be traveling all over the globe to spew violence against anything labeled “communism” in the first place. Essentially, the only thing these best and brightest have learned from Vietnam is that we should not have fought in Vietnam.

In the land where happiness is guaranteed in the Declaration of Independence

“Think raising the minimum wage is a good idea?”

“Think again.”

That was the message of a full-page advertisement that appeared in major newspapers in January. It was accompanied by statements of approval from the usual eminent suspects:

“The reason I object to the minimum wage is I think it destroys jobs, and I think the evidence on that, in my judgment, is overwhelming.” Alan

Greenspan, former Federal Reserve Chairman

“The high rate of unemployment among teenagers, and especially black teenagers, is both a scandal and a serious source of social unrest. Yet it is largely a result of minimum wage laws.” – Milton Friedman, Nobel Prize-winning economist^[13]

Well, if raising the minimum wage can produce such negative consequences, then surely it is clear what we as an enlightened and humane people must do. We must lower the minimum wage. And thus enjoy less unemployment, less social unrest. Indeed, if we lower the minimum wage to zero, particularly for poor blacks ... think of it! ... No unemployment at all! Hardly any social unrest! In fact – dare I say it? – What if we did away with wages altogether?

“The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy: that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness.” – John Kenneth Galbraith

Some little-known items from my old files

Here is US General Thomas Power speaking in December 1960 about things like nuclear war and a first strike by the United States: “The whole idea is to kill the bastards! At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win!” The response from one of those present was: “Well, you'd better make sure that they're a man and a woman.”^[14]

Edward R. Murrow is of course a

much-honored newsman and “legendary broadcaster”. There’s the annual Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy, with nominations made by the State Department, and there’s the recent acclaimed film about Murrow, “Good Night, and Good Luck”, amongst many other tributes.

In 1960, CBS aired “Harvest of Shame”, a documentary made by Murrow, which was lauded for exposing the terrible abuses endured by migratory farm workers in the United States.

The following year Murrow left broadcasting to become the director of the United States Information Agency, whose *raison d’être* was to make the United States look as good to the world as it does in American high school textbooks.

Thus it was that when the BBC planned on showing “Harvest of Shame” in the UK, Murrow called them in an effort to suppress the broadcast, saying it was for US domestic use only. But the film was shown in the UK.^[15]

One could wax cynical about Jimmy Carter as well; for example, while in the White House he tried hard to sabotage the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua; even worse, Carter supported the Islamic opposition to the leftist Afghanistan government in 1979, which led to a decade of very bloody civil war, the Taliban, and anti-American terrorism in the United States and elsewhere.

However, I think that overall Carter was closer to a decent human

being than any post-World War Two president. In 1978 he invited 1960s anti-war activist and leader of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Tom Hayden, to the White House. (Think George W inviting Michael Moore.)

As recounted by Hayden, in their private conversation he said to Carter: “You are the elected President of the United States, yet I’m concerned that you have less power than the chairmen of the boards of the large multinational corporations – men we don’t elect or even know.”

“After looking pensively out the Oval Office window, President Carter nodded and said, ‘I believe that’s right. I’ve learned that these last 12 months’.”^[16]

CT

NOTES

[1] “Aviation Week and Space Technology” (New York), August 5, 1996, p.51

[2] Speaking to the National Space Club (Washington, DC), September 15, 1997

[3] Excerpts are in the same sequence as found in the August 1997 brochure beginning on page 1.

[4] March 2004, www.stratcom.mil/fact_sheets/fact_sm.html. In 2002, the U.S. Space Command was merged with the U.S. Strategic Command.

[5] State Department Press Briefing, January 19, 2007, www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2007/79056.htm

[6] Associated Press, January 19, 2007

[7] Washington Post, December 17, 2006; p.12

When the BBC planned on showing “Harvest of Shame” in the UK, Murrow called them in an effort to suppress the broadcast, saying it was for US domestic use only

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[8] See note 5

[9] January 25, 2007 p.A19

[10] New York Times, October 7, 1990,
p.10

[11] For the full report of October 28,
2006, see www.vensolidarity.org

[12] Washington Post, January 30, 2007,
p.3

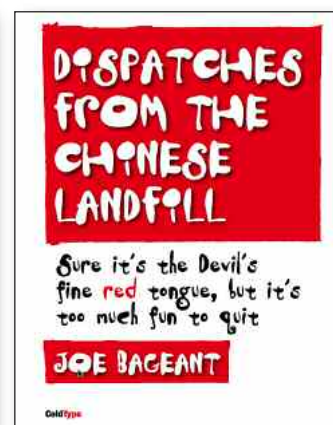
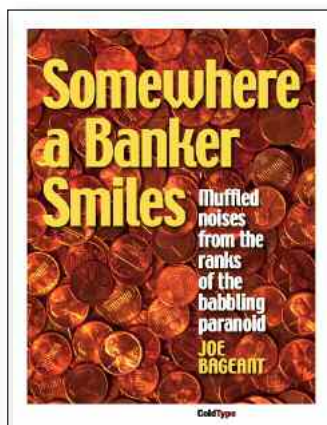
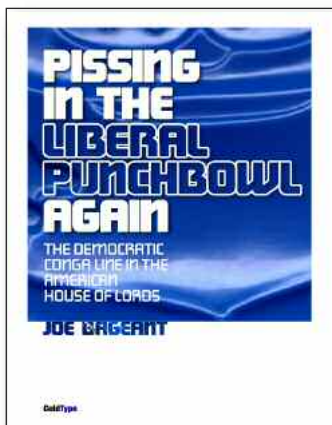
[13] To see the advertisement –
www.MinimumWage.or

[14] Fred Kaplan, “The Wizards of Ar-
mageddon” (1983), p.246

[15] Google <murrow “harvest of
shame” bbc>

[16] San Francisco Chronicle, March 4,
1978

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



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GENOCIDE IN GAZA

BY JOHN PILGER

A genocide is engulfing the people of Gaza while a silence engulfs its bystanders. “Some 1.4 million people, mostly children, are piled up in one of the most densely populated regions of the world, with no freedom of movement, no place to run and no space to hide,” wrote the senior UN relief official, Jan Egeland, and Jan Eliasson, then Swedish foreign minister, in *Le Figaro*. They described people “living in a cage”, cut off by land, sea and air, with no reliable power and little water and tortured by hunger and disease and incessant attacks by Israeli troops and planes.

Egeland and Eliasson wrote this four months ago as an attempt to break the silence in Europe whose obedient alliance with the United States and Israel has sought to reverse the democratic result that brought Hamas to power in last year’s Palestinian elections. The horror in Gaza has since been compounded; a family of 18 has died beneath a 500-pound American/Israeli bomb; unarmed women have been

mown down at point-blank range. Dr David Halpin, one of the few Britons to break what he calls “this medieval siege”, reported the killing of 57 children by artillery, rockets and small arms and was shown evidence that civilians are Israel’s true targets, as in Lebanon last summer. A friend in Gaza, Dr Mona El-Farra, emailed: “I see the effects of the relentless sonic booms [a collective punishment by the Israeli air force] and artillery on my 13-year-old daughter. At night, she shivers with fear. Then both of us end up crouching on the floor. I try to make her feel safe, but when the booms sound I flinch and scream...”

When I was last in Gaza, Dr Khalid Dahlan, a psychiatrist, showed me the results of a remarkable survey. “The statistic I personally find unbearable,” he said, “is that 99.4 per cent of the children we studied suffer trauma. Once you look at the rates of exposure to trauma you see why: 99.2 per cent of their homes were bombarded; 97.5 per cent were exposed to tear gas; 96.6 per cent witnessed shootings; 95.8 per cent

“At night, she shivers with fear. Then both of us end up crouching on the floor. I try to make her feel safe, but when the booms sound I flinch and scream”

The kidnapping a few days earlier by Israel of two Palestinians – two of thousands taken over the years – was not news

witnessed bombardment and funerals; almost a quarter saw family members injured or killed.” Dr Dahlan invited me to sit in on one of his clinics. There were 30 children, all of them traumatized. He gave each pencil and paper and asked them to draw. They drew pictures of grotesque acts of terror and of women streaming tears.

The excuse for the latest Israeli terror was the capture last June of an Israeli soldier, a member of an illegal occupation, by the Palestinian resistance. This was news. The kidnapping a few days earlier by Israel of two Palestinians – two of thousands taken over the years – was not news. An historian and two foreign journalists have reported the truth about Gaza. All three are Israelis. They are frequently called traitors.

Beginning to starve to death

The historian Ilan Pappé has documented that “the genocidal policy [in Gaza] is not formulated in a vacuum” but is part of Zionism’s deliberate, historic ethnic cleansing. Gideon Levy and Amira Hass are reporters on the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz.

In November, Levy described how the people of Gaza were beginning to starve to death ... “there are thousands of wounded, disabled and shell-shocked people unable to receive any treatment... the shadows of human beings roam the ruin... they only know the [Israeli army] will return and what

this will mean for them: more imprisonment in their homes for weeks, more death and destruction in monstrous proportions.”

Amira Hass, who has lived in Gaza, describes it as a prison that shames her people. She recalls how her mother, Hannah, was being marched from a cattle-train to the Nazi concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen on a summer’s day in 1944. “[She] saw these German women looking at the prisoners, just looking,” she wrote. “This image became very formative in my upbringing, this despicable ‘looking from the side.’”

“Looking from the side” is what those of us do who are cowed into silence by the threat of being called anti-Semitic. Looking from the side is what too many western Jews do, while those Jews who honour the humane traditions of Judaism and say, “Not in our name!” are abused as “self-despising”. Looking from the side is what almost the entire US Congress does, in thrall to or intimidated by a vicious Zionist “lobby”. Looking from the side is what “even-handed” journalists do as they excuse the lawlessness that is the source of Israeli atrocities and suppress the historic shifts in the Palestinian resistance, such as the implicit recognition of Israel by Hamas. The people of Gaza cry out for better. **CT**

John Pilger’s latest book is Freedom Next Time. This article originally appeared in the New Statesman.

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