

MICHAEL I. NIMAN | THIS'LL KILL YA!  
DIANA JOHNSTONE | AS THE WARRIORS GLOAT  
STAN WINER | JOURNEY TO JAIL

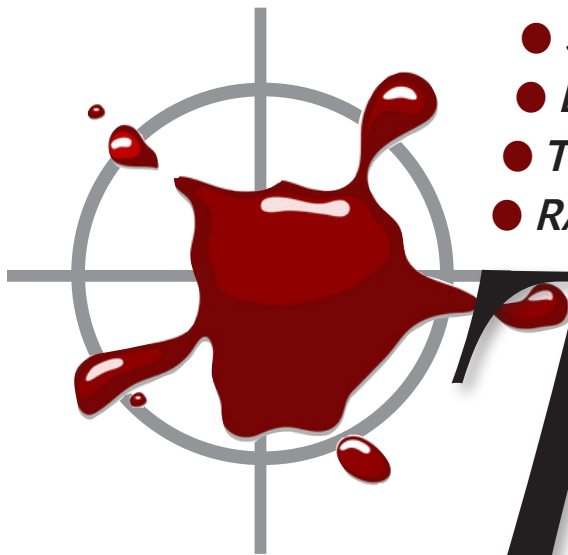
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JANUARY 2012

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ISSUE 62

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- DAVE LINDORFF ● SHERWOOD ROSS
- TOM BURGHARDT ● MARK HURWITT
- RAY McGOVERN & ELIZABETH MURRAY



# Target IRAN

*Lies. Propaganda. Provocation.*



Editor:  
Tony Sutton  
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# ColdType

JANUARY 2012 / ISSUE 62

## EDITOR'S NOTE

THE power of Western propaganda is amazing. And frightening.

Two examples: Iran captures a US drone illegally flying over its territory, after which Washington persuades the media that Iran is the wicked aggressor because it refuses to hand back the captured drone. Then there's Israel, the most belligerent state in the Middle East, armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons, passing itself off as a defenceless target of likely Iranian attack, if and when that country gets a nuclear bomb.

Never mind that Iran has never attacked anyone, unlike the US and Israel. Never mind the threat to Iran from the ring of US client-states that surround it, or all the Western-induced regime-changing that has occurred among its neighbours over the past decade.

In the eyes of the Western media, Iran is the Great Satan, poised to attack and destroy our way of life. The reality is the opposite. The propaganda is Orwellian: War is peace. Lies are truth.

Our cover story package this month highlights the deceptions, and searches for reality in this undeclared war . . .

Tony Sutton, Editor

3. THIS'LL KILL YA! *Michael I. Niman*
5. TAUGHT TO KILL *Luke Hiken*
7. AS THE WARRIORS GLOAT *Diana Johnstone*
12. HE WAS 22. SHE WAS 12 *Tom Engelhardt*
16. A BETTER WORLD IS ON THE WAY (MAYBE) *David Michael Green*

## COVER STORIES – TARGET IRAN

22. TEN QUESTIONS FOR MR HAGUE *Stuart Littlewood*
24. A MURKY, PERILOUS GAME *Barry Lando*
26. HURWITT'S EYE *Mark Hurwitt*
27. EMPIRES DON'T APOLOGISE *Tom Burghardt*
33. WHY DO THEY HATE US? *Dave Lindorff*
36. PERSIAN ROULETTE *Ray McGovern & Elizabeth Murray*
42. WAR ADVOCATES TAKE SOME HEAVY HITS *Sherwood Ross*
44. JOURNEY TO JAIL *Stan Winer*
46. ISRAEL'S GRAND HYPOCRISY *Jonathan Cook*
49. CONTROLLING THE INTERNET BY STEALTH *John W. Whitehead*
52. UNDERSTANDING PRIORITIES *Fred Reed*
54. UNMASKING THE PRESS *George Monbiot*
57. SOME THOUGHTS THAT OCCUPY MY MIND *William Blum*
62. TOUCHY-FEELY PROPAGANDA *Philip Kraske*
65. THE PRIME TIME WAR *John Pilger*
67. ZOMBIES ATE THE ECONOMY *Joshua Holland*

# This'll kill ya!

**Michael I. Niman** discusses pepper spray and the modern lexicon of 'less than lethal' oppression

It's remarkable what we seem to get used to. By now, most readers will have seen viral YouTube footage of peaceful Californian Occupy protestors being pepper-sprayed by aggressive cops in riot costumes. The words "pepper" and "spray" have come together to form a verb. It's part of our nasty new police state lexicon. Like "kettle," which used to be a comfort noun. (Think of a warm kettle on a hot stove on a cold winter evening.) Now it's a verb, casually thrown around to describe the police action of wrapping orange netting around people, "kettling" them into a twisting, squirming mass.

Think "flash-bang" grenade – a new twist on the old blitzkrieg idea. Think "Taser," as in "You see that guy get tased?" Think "pepper ball gun." The list keeps growing of new words to describe new weapons essentially used to silence dissent, terrorize activists into apathy, and circumvent the maturation of our public political discourse.

There's a long history of such weapons being used on peaceful demonstrators. Schools still teach about racist cops using fire hoses, batons, and German shepherds to terrorize nonviolent voters' rights activists during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, for example. By the early 1990s the weapons had become more refined but no less deadly. Police agencies that use them, and the manufacturers who mark them,

prefer to call them "nonlethal weapons," but weapons such as pepper spray and Tasers have been implicated in the deaths of many hundreds of people. So we now call them "less than lethal weapons," since they are less lethal than armaments we term "lethal weapons," such as guns, bayonets, and mortars.

Now here's where things are getting particularly disturbing.

Pepper spray-type weapons are nasty. There is a huge body of evidence documenting that pepper spray, when used properly, can seriously injure or kill people. It's pretty much a roll of the dice, with one ACLU investigation in the mid 1990s finding a death associated with one out of every 600 police uses of the weapon.

Pepper spray is made from the oily extract of pepper plants in the capsicum family, comprised of "fat soluble phenols" that, when exposed to skin, can cause intense pain, blistering, and inflammation. The oily nature of the extract makes the substance difficult to remove, prolonging symptoms for an extended period. If it gets into the lungs, pepper spray can cause wheezing, shortness of breath, gasping, panic, and, in rare cases, deoxygenation of blood (cyanosis), temporary suspension of breathing (apnea), or respiratory arrest, which is a total cessation of breathing, leading to suffocation. In the nasal passages pepper spray can trigger

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spray as if they  
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cockroaches**  
.....

a stroke or heart attack. The odds get worse for someone with an acute respiratory condition such as asthma, which is becoming more common among younger people. Pepper spray, when shot into one's eyes, can lead to abrasions of the cornea and vision impairment.

We've got to stop making jokes about spraying this stuff on pizza and face up to the potentially deadly reality of this weapon.

Weapons manufacturers and police agencies argue in defense of "less than lethal" weapons, saying that deadly as they may be, these weapons save lives, in that they provide a less lethal alternative to the use of deadly force when subduing dangerous and irrational assailants. According to this argument, it's better to pepper spray or tase someone than to shoot them or club them. Following this logic, police policies around the US clearly outline that such weapons can only be deployed as a last-ditch alternative to deadly force, only to be used when an officer's life, or the life of a civilian, is threatened.

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**Last ditch alternative?**

So let's apply this policy to the recent applications of pepper spray as a political weapon. In the case of Occupy protestors sprayed while they were committing nonviolent civil disobedience, such as sitting with their arms linked, or refusing to leave their tents, were they really about to be shot dead? Were Occupiers who were being evicted from public parks, ostensibly over health code violations, about to be bayoneted to death, clubbed to death, or shot with a pistol? Was the use of these weapons a last-ditch alternative to killing the demonstrators?

Let's be serious. There were violent criminals at all of these events, and we know exactly who they were. Only a sociopath can stand there in front of a human being and spray him or her in the face, in the eyes, at close range, with pepper spray

as if they were spraying for cockroaches. Such actions, according to Frank La Rue, the United Nations' special rapporteur for the Protection of Free Expression, are violating the human rights of demonstrators. The problem is cultural. In the US, police often mistake disorder, which is a historic hallmark of political demonstrations, with violence, which it is not. Hence, an officer can see peaceful demonstrators sitting and blocking a sidewalk, for example, as an affront to orderly foot traffic. A poorly trained officer could perceive this threat to order as violence. Once this imagined violence takes root in their minds, they have a rationale, if not an imperative, to confront it with real violence.

Because of this mindset, and a society that seems willing to accept such lunacy, our best patriots, the ones willing to take to the streets as volunteers participating in the democratic process, have been beaten, sprayed, tased, kettled, and gassed. On a bad day one can suffer all of these afflictions. And for years, such abuses dissuaded folks from participating in demonstrations. When people have to bring respirators and swim goggles with them in order to peaceably express their beliefs and frustrations, we can't help but ask ourselves, "Where do we live?" and "What has happened to our country?" People at home, seeing images of demonstrators being abused, would recoil in horror, uncomfortably comforted by the fact that their own bodies were saved by their apathy. The baggage that goes with this, in the form of a feeling of helplessness, is toxic to a democracy.

This year has been different. In Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and finally here in the United States, when people saw the horrific images of brave, nonviolent patriots being beaten, pepper sprayed, and worse, they reacted by asking themselves, "Why wasn't I there?" **CT**

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

# Taught to kill

**Luke Hiken** meets the former chief prosecutor at Guantanamo, who wonders what happened to Barack Obama after he became president

**T**he video of UC Davis police officer, Lt. John Pike, blithely spraying tear gas at non-violent students (as if it were not a toxic poison) should come as no surprise to the American people. The obvious truth is that the only way police know how to respond to anti-authoritarian conduct by citizens is to use escalating methods of violence: baton strikes, tear gas, tasers, and then guns, frequently followed by beatings being administered outside the purview of cameras.

The old adage: “if you’re a hammer, everything you see is a nail” never had a clearer application than as it applies to the conduct of America’s “finest.” The initial police response to non-violent conduct by activists in the Civil Rights Movement was the same – batons, attack dogs, and brutality. It was not until those responses proved to be unsuccessful, even counter-productive, that the segregationist South modified its response.

Rather than silencing dissent, police violence and abuse frequently provides the very spark that a docile, unfocused movement needs to grow and develop consciousness. It is not that police officers are inherently cruel and violent (although there are many who are drawn to that profession as a vehicle for carrying out such fantasies), rather it is the fact that police are never taught alternatives to violence as methods of keep-

ing the peace. In fact, many police departments employ combat soldiers, fresh from their apprenticeship in war zones, to “serve and protect” just as they learned how to do it in Afghanistan, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and the other areas where Americans ply our trade.

Every parent in the country knows that violence and repression are the worst teachers in an individual’s arsenal. While many parents believe it is occasionally acceptable to spank a naughty child in order to teach it a lesson, none with an ounce of intelligence and sanity, would administer violent beatings on a regular basis. Indeed, if a parent were to inflict constant physical abuse upon a child (s)he would be immediately relieved of his or her parental responsibilities.

So why is it that when police departments, foreign mercenaries, Pentagon bureaucrats and others involved in America’s repressive bureaucracies resort to violence as their first and only method of mass control, the society sits idly by, and accepts the conduct as inevitable?

One would expect that the police and prosecuting agencies of the country would be the first to develop alternative, nurturing solutions to social challenges. Yet the opposite is true. District Attorneys are the first to cry foul if non-violent inmates are to be released from outrageously long prison sentences. Police spend half of their time

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warning the public about how dangerous living in America can be, and the other half of the time beating on people and sending them to prison. This country imprisons a greater percent of its population than any “democratic” country on earth – five times more of our population than any country in Europe.

That the politics of fear and threats of violence are perpetuated by police and military agencies that profit from repression should come as no surprise. That the American people would condone these lies by tolerating police brutality in our communities, is simply shocking. One would expect that the American public would be the first to intervene in situations of unwarranted violence and abuse; yet we tolerate levels of imprisonment and state-sanctioned violence that most people of the world would rise up against.

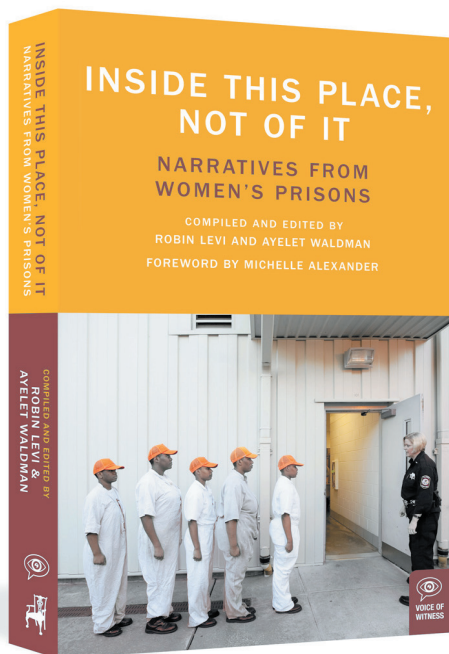
There have always been those who benefit from a police state. The notorious capitalist robber baron, Jay Gould, proudly proclaimed that he “could hire one-half of the working class to kill the other half.” The economics of the military-industrial complex provide the most recent stunning example of this phenomenon. We are spending over

half of the American economy fighting nations that pose no threat to anyone but themselves.

There is a price to be paid by allowing a police state to flourish unabated. The image of Lt. Pike arrogantly assaulting the seated students at their peaceful demonstration is a chilling image akin to similar scenes in Pinochet’s Chile or apartheid South Africa. A docile population can easily find itself more threatened and endangered by uncontrolled state domination than a society that relies upon the citizenry itself to protect its rights.

The Occupy Movement, the non-violent demonstration at Davis, and the civil disobedience that is becoming part and parcel of this unequal society are a result of social problems that will be resolved through dialogue, disagreement and struggle. Police violence will only exacerbate the problems that are festering in this country. It is part of the problem, not a solution. **CT**

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*Luke Hiken is an attorney who has engaged in the practice of criminal, military, immigration, and appellate law. This article first appeared at the web site of Progressive Avenues, [www.progressiveavenues.org](http://www.progressiveavenues.org)*



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# As the warriors gloat

Diana Johnstone asks the key question after the war on Libya

**T**hese days the humanitarian warriors are riding high, thanks to their proclaimed victory in Libya. The world's only superpower, with moral, military and mercenary support from the democracy-loving emirate of Qatar and the historic imperialist powers, Britain and France, was unsurprisingly able to smash the existing government of a sparsely populated North African state in a mere seven months. The country has been violently "liberated" and left up for grabs. Who gets what pieces of it, among the armed militia, tribes and Islamist jihadists, will be of no more interest to Western media and humanitarians than was the real life of Libya before Qatar's television channel Al Jazeera aroused their crusading zeal back in February with undocumented reports of imminent atrocities.

Libya can sink back into obscurity while the Western champions of its destruction hog the limelight. To spice up their self-congratulations, they accord some derisive attention to the poor fools who failed to jump on the bandwagon.

In the United States, and even more so in France, the war party poopsters were few in number and almost totally ignored. But it is as good an occasion as any to isolate them even further.

In his article, *Libya and the Left: Benghazi and After*, Michael Bérubé uses the occasion

to bunch together the varied critics of the war as "the Manichean left" who, according to him, simply respond with kneejerk opposition to whatever the United States does. He and his kind, in contrast, reflect deeply and come up with profound reasons to bomb Libya.

He starts off:

"In late March of 2011, a massacre was averted – not just any ordinary massacre, mind you. For had Qaddafi and his forces managed to crush the Libyan rebellion in what was then its stronghold, Benghazi, the aftershocks would have reverberated well beyond eastern Libya. As Tom Malinowski of Human Rights Watch wrote, 'Qaddafi's victory – alongside Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's fall – would have signaled to other authoritarian governments from Syria to Saudi Arabia to China that if you negotiate with protesters you lose, but if you kill them you win.'..."

"The NATO-led attack on Gaddafi's forces therefore did much more than prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Libya – though it should be acknowledged that this alone might have been sufficient justification. It helped keep alive the Arab Spring..."

Now all that is perfectly hypothetical.

Whatever massacre was averted in March, other massacres took place instead, later on.

That is, if crushing an armed rebellion

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**Whatever Libyan massacre was averted in March, other massacres took place instead, later on**  
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## AFTER THE WAR

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**Mubarak lost not because he negotiated with protesters but because his US-financed Army decided to dump him**

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implies a massacre, a victorious armed rebellion also implies a massacre, so it becomes a choice of massacres.

And, had the Latin American and African mediation proposals been taken up, the hypothetical massacre might have been averted by other means, even if the armed rebellion was defeated – a hypothesis the pro-war party refused to consider from the outset.

But even more hypothetical is the notion that the failure of the Libyan rebellion would have fatally damaged “the Arab spring”. This is pure speculation, without a shred of supporting evidence.

Authoritarian governments certainly did not need a lesson to teach them how to deal with protesters, which ultimately depends on their political and military means. Mubarak lost not because he negotiated with protesters but because his US-financed Army decided to dump him. In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia helps kill the protesters. In any case, authoritarian Arab rulers, not least the Emir of Qatar, hated Gadaffi, who had the habit of denouncing their hypocrisy to their faces at international meetings. They could only take heart from his downfall.

These pro-war arguments are in a class with the “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq or the threat of “genocide” in Kosovo – hypothetical dangers used to justify preventive war. “Preventive war” is what allows a military superpower, which is too powerful ever to have to defend itself against foreign attack, to attack other countries anyway. Otherwise, what’s the point of this superb military if we can’t use it? as Madeleine Albright once put it.

Later on in his article, Bérubé cites his fellow humanitarian warrior Ian Williams, who argued that the litany of objections to intervention in Libya “evades the crucial question: Should the world let Libyan civilians die at the hands of a tyrant?” Or in other words, the “key question” is: “When a group of people who are about to be massacred ask for help, what do you do?”

With this selection of the guilt-tripping “crucial” or “key” question, Bérubé and Williams sweep away all the various legal, ethical and political objections to the NATO attack on Libya.

But nothing has authorized these gentlemen to decide which is the “key question”. In reality, their “key question” raises a number of other questions.

First of all: Who is the group of people? Are they really about to be massacred? What is the source of the information? Could the reports be exaggerated? Or could they even be invented, in order to get foreign powers to intervene?

A young French film-maker, Julien Teil, has filmed a remarkable interview in which the secretary general of the Libyan League for Human Rights, Slimane Bouchuiguir, candidly admits that he had “no proof” of the allegations he made before the UN Human Rights Commission which led to immediate expulsion of the official Libyan representative and from there to UN Resolutions authorizing what turned into the NATO war of regime change. Indeed, no proof has ever been produced of the “bombing of Libyan civilians” denounced by Al Jazeera, the television channel financed by the Emir of Qatar, who has emerged with a large share of Libyan oil business from the “liberation war” in which Qatar participated.

Just imagine how many disgruntled minority groups exist in countries all around the world who would be delighted to have NATO bomb them to power. If all they have to do to achieve this is to find a TV channel that will broadcast their claims that they are “about to be massacred”, NATO will be kept busy for the next few decades, to the delight of the humanitarian interventionists.

A salient trait of the latter is their selective gullibility. On the one hand, they automatically dismiss all official statements from “authoritarian” governments as false propaganda. On the other hand, they seem never to have noticed that minorities have an interest in lying about their plight in or-



der to gain outside support. I observed this in Kosovo. For most Albanians, it was a matter of virtuous duty to their national group to say whatever was likely to gain support of foreigners for their cause. Truth was not a major criterion. There was no need to blame them for this but there was no need to believe them, either. Most reporters sent to Kosovo, knowing what would please their editors, based their dispatches on whatever tales were told them by Albanians eager to have NATO wrest Kosovo away from Serbia and give it to them. Which is what happened.

In fact, it is wise to be cautious about what all sides are saying in ethnic or religious conflicts, especially in foreign countries with which one is not intimately familiar. Perhaps people rarely lie in homogeneous Iceland, but in much of the world, lying is a normal way to promote group interests.

The poignant “key question” as to how to answer “a group of people about to be massacred” is a rhetorical trick to shift the problem out of the realm of contradictory reality into the pure sphere of moralistic fiction. It implies that “we” in the West, including the most passive television spectator, possess knowledge and moral authority to judge and act on every conceivable event anywhere in the world. We do not. And the problem is that the intermediary institutions, which should possess the requisite knowledge and moral authority, have been and are being weakened and subverted by the United States in its insatiable pursuit to bite off more than it can chew. Because the United States has military power, it promotes military power as the solution to all problems. Diplomacy and mediation are increasingly neglected and despised. This is not even a deliberate, thought-out policy, but the automatic result of sixty years of military buildup.

**The real crucial question**

In France, whose president Nicolas Sarkozy

launched the anti-Gadaffi crusade, the pro-war unanimity has been greater than in the United States. One of the few prominent French personalities to speak out against it is Rony Brauman, a former president of Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and a critic of the ideology of “humanitarian intervention” promoted by another former MSF leader, Bernard Kouchner. The November 24 issue of *Le Monde* carried a debate between Brauman and the war’s main promoter, Bernard-Henri Lévy, which actually brought out the real crucial question.

The debate began with a few skirmishes about facts. Brauman, who had initially supported the notion of a limited intervention to protect Benghazi, recalled that he had rapidly changed his mind upon realizing that the threats involved were a matter of propaganda, not of observable realities. The aerial attacks on demonstrators in Tripoli were an “invention of Al Jazeera”, he observed.

To which Bernard-Henri Lévy replied in his trademark style of brazen-it-out indignant lying. “What!?! An invention of Al Jazeera? How can you, Rony Brauman, deny the reality of those fighter planes swooping down to machinegun demonstrators in Tripoli that the entire world has seen?” Never mind that the entire world has seen no such thing. Bernard-Henri Lévy knows that whatever he says will be heard on television and read in the newspapers, no need for proof. “On the one hand, you had a super-powerful army equipped for decades and prepared for a popular uprising. On the other hand, you had unarmed civilians.”

Almost none of this was true. Gadaffi, fearing a military coup, had kept his army relatively weak. The much-denounced Western military equipment has never been used and its purchase, like the arms purchases by most oil-rich states, was more of a favor to Western suppliers than a useful contribution to defense. Moreover, the uprising in Libya, in contrast to protests in

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the surrounding countries, was notoriously armed.

But aside from the facts of the matter, the crucial issue between the two Frenchmen was a matter of principle: is or is not war a good thing?

Asked whether the Libya war marks the victory of the right of intervention, Brauman replied:

“Yes, undoubtedly... Some rejoice at that victory. As for me, I deplore it for I see there the rehabilitation of war as the way to settle conflicts.”

Brauman concluded: “Aside from the frivolity with which the National Transition Council, most of whose members were unknown, was immediately presented by Bernard-Henri Lévy as a secular democratic movement, there is a certain naiveté in wanting to ignore the fact that war creates dynamics favorable to radicals to the detriment of moderates. This war is not over.

“In making the choice of militarizing the revolt, the NTC gave the most violent their opportunity. By supporting that option in the name of democracy, NATO took on a heavy responsibility beyond its means. It is because war is a bad thing in itself that we should not wage it...”

Bernard-Henri Lévy had the last word: “War is not a bad thing in itself! If it makes it possible to avoid a greater violence, it is a necessary evil – that’s the whole theory of just war.”

The idea that this principle exists is “like a sword of Damocles over the heads of tyrants who consider themselves the owners of their people, it is already a formidable progress.” Bernard-Henri Lévy is made happy by the thought that since the end of the Libya war, Bashir Al Assad and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sleep less soundly. In short, he rejoices at the prospect of still more wars.

So there is the crucial, key question: is war a bad thing in itself? Brauman says it is, and the media star known as BHL says it is not, “if it makes it possible to avoid a greater

violence”. But what violence is greater than war? When much of Europe was still lying in ruins after World War II, the Nuremberg Tribunal issued its Final Judgment proclaiming:

“War is essentially an evil thing. Its consequences are not confined to the belligerent states alone, but affect the whole world. To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

And indeed, World War II contained within itself “the accumulated evil of the whole”: the deaths of 20 million Soviet citizens, Auschwitz, the bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and much, much more.

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**Wars to “save victims”**

Sixty years later, it is easy for Americans and Western Europeans, their lives still relatively comfortable, their narcissism flattered by the ideology of “human rights”, to contemplate initiating “humanitarian” wars to “save victims” – wars in which they themselves take no more risk than when playing a video game. Kosovo and Libya were the perfect humanitarian wars: no casualties, not even a scratch, for the NATO bombers, and not even the necessity to see the bloodshed on the ground. With the development of drone warfare, such safe war at a distance opens endless prospects for risk-free “humanitarian intervention”, which can allow Western celebrities like Bernard-Henri Lévy to strut and pose as passionate champions of hypothetical victims of hypothetical massacres hypothetically prevented by real wars.

The “key question”? There are many important questions raised by the Libya war, and many important and valid reasons to have opposed it and to oppose it still. Like the Kosovo war, it has left a legacy of hatred

in the targeted country whose consequences may poison the lives of the people living there for generations. That of course is of no particular interest to people in the West who pay no attention to the human damage wrought by their humanitarian killing. It is only the least visible result of those wars.

For my part, the key issue which motivates my opposition to the Libya war is what it means for the future of the United States and of the world. For well over half a century, the United States has been cannibalized by its military-industrial complex, which has infantilized its moral sense, squandered its wealth and undermined its political integrity. Our political leaders are not genuine leaders, but have been reduced to the role of apologists for this monster, which has a bureaucratic momentum of its own – proliferating military bases around the world, seeking out and even creating servile client states, needlessly provoking other pow-

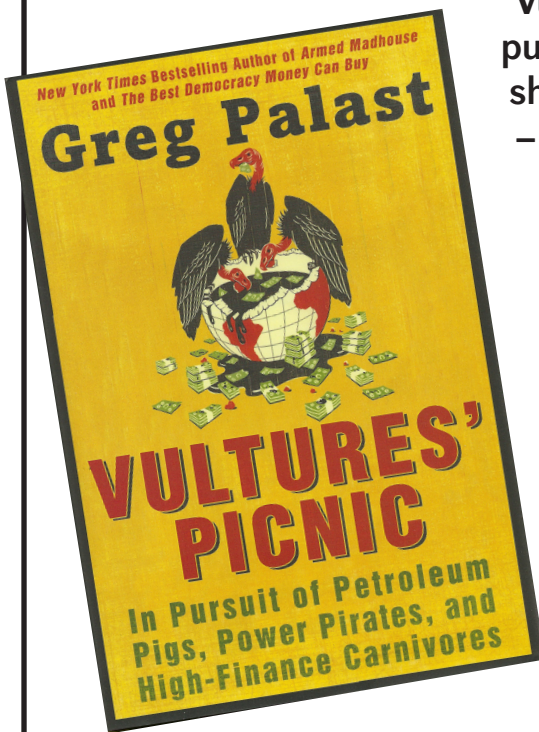
ers such as Russia and China. The primary political duty of Americans and their European allies should be to reduce and dismantle this gigantic military machine before it leads us all inadvertently into “the supreme international crime” of no return.

So my principal opposition to this recent war is precisely that, at a time when even some in Washington were hesitant, the “humanitarian interventionists” such as Bernard-Henry Lévy, with their sophisticated “R2P” pretense of “protecting innocent civilians”, have fed and encouraged this monster by offering it “the low-hanging fruit” of an easy victory in Libya. This has made the struggle to bring a semblance of peace and sanity to the world even more difficult than it was already.

**CT**

*Diana Johnstone is the author of “Fools Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions”*

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 .....



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# He was 22. She was 12

Tom Engelhardt brings some lessons from the dead for a no-learning-curve world

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**Aside from those who love them, who pays much attention anymore to the deaths of American troops in distant lands?**  
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**H**e was 22, a corporal in the Marines from Preston, Iowa, a “city” incorporated in 1890 with a present population of 949. He died in a hospital in Germany of “wounds received from an explosive device while on patrol in Helmand province [Afghanistan].” Of him, his high school principal said, “He was a good kid.” He is survived by his parents.

He was 20, a private in the 10th Mountain Division from Boyne City, population 3,735 souls, which bills itself as “the fastest growing city in Northern Michigan.” He died of “wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his unit with small-arms fire” and is survived by his parents.

These were the last two of the 10 Americans whose deaths in Afghanistan were announced by the Pentagon Thanksgiving week. The other eight came from Apache Junction, Arizona; Fayetteville, North Carolina; Greensboro, North Carolina; Navarre, Florida; Wichita, Kansas; San Jose, California; Moline, Illinois; and Danville, California. Six of them died from improvised explosive devices (roadside bombs), assumedly without ever seeing the Afghan enemies who killed them. One died of “indirect fire” and another “while conducting combat operations.” On such things, Defense Department press releases are relatively tight-lipped, as was the Army, for instance, when it released news that same week of 17 “potential sui-

cides” among active-duty soldiers in October.

These days, the names of the dead dribble directly onto the inside pages of newspapers, or simply into the ether, in a war now opposed by 63% of Americans, according to the latest CNN/ORC opinion poll, but in truth barely remembered by anyone in this country. It’s a reality made easier by the fact that the dead of America’s All-Volunteer Army tend to come from forgettable places – small towns, obscure suburbs, third or fourth-rank cities – and a military that ever fewer Americans have any connection with.

Aside from those who love them, who pays much attention anymore to the deaths of American troops in distant lands? These deaths are, after all, largely dwarfed by local fatality counts like the 16 Americans who died in accidents on Ohio’s highways over the long Thanksgiving weekend of 2010 or the 32,788 Americans who died in road fatalities that same year?

So who, that same week, was going to pay the slightest attention to the fate of 50 year-old Mohammad Rahim, a farmer from Kandahar Province in southern Afghanistan? Four of his children – two sons and two daughters, all between four and 12 years old – were killed in a “NATO” (undoubtedly American) airstrike, while working in their fields. In addition, an eight-year-old daugh-

ter of his was “badly wounded.” Whether Rahim himself was killed is unclear from the modest reports we have of the “incident.”

In all, seven civilians and possibly two fleeing insurgents died. Rahim’s uncle Abdul Samad, however, is quoted as saying, “There were no Taliban in the field; this is a baseless allegation that the Taliban were planting mines. I have been to the scene and haven’t found a single bit of evidence of bombs or any other weapons. The Americans did a serious crime against innocent children, they will never be forgiven.”

As in all such cases, NATO has opened an “investigation” into what happened. The results of such investigations seldom become known.

Similarly, on Thanksgiving weekend, 24 to 28 Pakistani soldiers, including two officers, were killed in “NATO” helicopter and fighter-jet attacks on two outposts across the Afghan border in Pakistan. One post, according to Pakistani sources, was attacked twice. More soldiers were wounded. Outraged Pakistani officials promptly denounced the attack, closed key border crossings to US vehicles supplying the war in Afghanistan, and demanded that the US leave a key airbase used for the CIA’s drone war in the Pakistani tribal areas. In response, American officials, military and civilian, offered condolences and yet pleaded “self-defense,” while offering promises of a thorough investigation of the circumstances surrounding the “friendly fire incident.”

Amid these relatively modest death counts, don’t forget one staggering figure that came to light that same Thanksgiving week: the estimate that, in Iraq, 900,000 wives have lost their husbands since the US invasion in March 2003. Not surprisingly, many of these widows are in a state of desperation and reportedly getting next to no help from either the Iraqi or the American governments. Though their 900,000 husbands undoubtedly died in various ways, warlike, civil-war-like, and peaceable, the

figure does offer a crude indicator of the levels of carnage the US invasion loosed on that country over the last eight and a half years.

**Creative destruction in the greater Middle East**

Think of all this as just a partial one-week’s scorecard of American-style war. While you’re at it, remember Washington’s high hopes only a decade ago for what America’s “lite,” “shock and awe” military would do, for the way it would singlehandedly crush enemies, reorganize the Middle East, create a new order on Earth, set the oil flowing, privatize and rebuild whole nations, and usher in a global peace, especially in the Greater Middle East, on terms pleasing to the planet’s sole superpower.

That such sky-high “hopes” were then the coin of the realm in Washington is a measure of the way delusional thinking passed for the strategic variety and a reminder of how, for a time, pundits of every sort dealt with those hopes as if they represented reality itself. And yet, it should have come as no shock that a military-first “foreign policy” and a military force with staggering technological powers at its command would prove incapable of building anything. No one should have been surprised that such a force was good only for what it was built for: death and destruction.

A case might be made that the US military’s version of “creative destruction,” driven directly into the oil heartlands of the planet, did prepare the way, however inadvertently, for the Arab Spring to come, in part by unifying the region in misery and visceral dislike. In the meantime, the “mistakes,” the “incidents,” the “collateral damage,” the slaughtered wedding parties and bombed funerals, the “mishaps,” and “miscommunications” continued to pile up – as did dead Afghans, Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Americans, so many from places you’ve never heard of if you weren’t born there.

.....  
**It should have come as no shock that a military-first “foreign policy” and a military force with staggering technological powers at its command would prove incapable of building anything**  
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**In Pakistan, the American drone war combined with the latest “incident” on the Pakistani border, has further destabilized that country**  
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None of this should have surprised anyone. Perhaps at least marginally more surprising was the inability of the US military to wield its destructive power to win anything whatsoever. Since the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, there have been so many proclamations of “success,” of “mission accomplished,” of corners turned and tipping points reached, of “progress” made, and so very, very little to show.

Amid the destruction, destabilization, and disaster, the high hopes quietly evaporated. Now, of course, “shock and awe” is long gone. Those triumphant “surges” are history. Counterinsurgency, or COIN – for a while the hottest thing around – has been swept back into the dustbin of history from which General (now CIA Director) David Petraeus rescued it not so many years ago.

After a decade in Afghanistan in which the US military has battled a minority insurgency, perhaps as unpopular as any “popular” movement could be, the war there is now almost universally considered “unwinnable” or a “stalemate.” Of course, what a stalemate means when the planet’s most powerful military takes on a bunch of backcountry guerrillas, some armed with weapons that deserve to be in museums, is at best an open question.

Meanwhile, after almost nine years of war and occupation, the US military is shutting down its multi-billion-dollar mega-bases in Iraq and withdrawing its troops. Though it leaves behind a monster State Department mission guarded by a 5,000-man army of mercenaries, a militarized budget of \$6.5 billion for 2012, and more than 700 mostly hire-a-gun trainers, Iraq is visibly a loss for Washington. In Pakistan, the American drone war combined with the latest “incident” on the Pakistani border, evidently involving US special forces operatives, has further destabilized that country and the US alliance there. A major Pakistani presidential candidate is already calling for the end of that alliance, while anti-Americanism grows by leaps and bounds.

None of this should startle either. After all, what exactly could an obdurately military-first foreign policy bring with it but the whirlwind (and not just to foreign lands either)? As the Occupy Wall Street protests and their repression remind us, American police forces, too, were heavily militarized. Meanwhile, our wars and national security spending have drained the US of trillions of dollars in national treasure, leaving behind a country in political gridlock, its economy in something close to a shock-and-awe state, its infrastructure crumbling, and vast majorities of its angry citizens convinced that their land is not only “on the wrong track,” but “in decline.”

.....  
**Into the whirlwind**

A decade later, perhaps the only thing that should truly cause surprise is how little has been learned in Washington. The military-first policy of choice that rang in the century – there were, of course, other options available – has become the only option left in Washington’s impoverished arsenal. After all, the country’s economic power is in tatters (which is why the Europeans are looking to China for help in the Euro crisis), its “soft power” has gone down the tubes, and its diplomatic corps has either been militarized or was long ago relegated to the back of the bus of state.

What couldn’t be stranger, is that from the whirlwind of policy disaster, the Obama administration has drawn the least likely conclusion: that more of what has so visibly failed us is in order – from Pakistan to Uganda, Afghanistan to Somalia, the Persian Gulf to China. Yes, COIN is out and drones as well as special operations forces are in, but the essential policy remains the same.

The evidence of the last decade clearly indicates that nothing of significance is likely to be built from the rubble of such a global policy – most obviously in relations with China, America’s greatest creditor. However, there, too, as President Obama signaled



(however feebly) with his recent announcement of a symbolic permanent deployment of US Marines to Darwin, Australia, the military path remains the path of least resistance. As Michael Klare put it recently in the *Nation* magazine, “It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the White House has decided to counter China’s spectacular economic growth with a military riposte.”

As Barry Lando, former 60 Minutes producer, points out, China, not the US, is already “one of the largest oil beneficiaries of the Iraq War.” In fact, our military build-up throughout the Persian Gulf region is, in essence, guarding Chinese commerce. “Just as American troops and bases have spread along the Gulf,” Lando writes, “so have China’s businessmen, eager to exploit the vital resources that the US military is thoughtfully protecting... A strange symbiosis: American bases and Chinese markets.”

In other words, the single most monstrous mistake of the Bush years – the confusion of military with economic power – has been set in stone. Washington continues to lead with its drones and ask questions or offer condolences or launch investigations later. This is, of course, a path guaranteed to bring destruction and blowback in its wake. None of it is likely to benefit us in the long run, least of all in relation to China.

When history, that most unpredictable of

subjects, becomes predictable, watch out.

In what should be a think-outside-the-box moment, the sole lesson Washington seems capable of absorbing is that its failed policy is the only possible policy. Among other things, this means more “incidents,” more “mistakes,” more “accidents,” more dead, more embittered people vowing vengeance, more investigations, more pleas of self-defense, more condolences, more money draining out of the US treasury, and more destabilization.

As it has been since September 12, 2001, Washington remains engaged in a fierce and costly losing battle with ghosts in which, unfortunately, perfectly real people die, and perfectly real women are widowed.

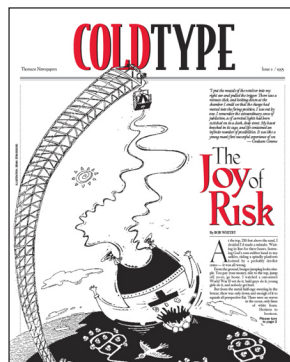
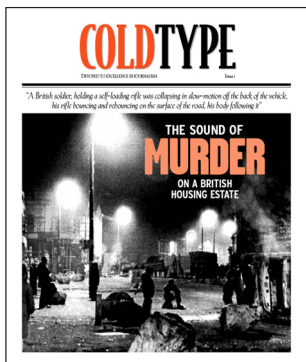
He was 22 years old...

She was 12...

Those are lines you will read again and again in our no-learning-curve world and no condolences will be enough. **CT**

*Tom Engelhardt, co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of “The American Way of War: How Bush’s Wars Became Obama’s” as well as “The End of Victory Culture”, runs the Nation Institute’s TomDispatch.com. His latest book, “The United States of Fear” (Haymarket Books), has just been published. This essay first ran at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)*

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**The sole lesson Washington seems capable of absorbing is that its failed policy is the only possible policy**  
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# A better world is on the way (maybe)

As an election year beckons, **David Michael Green** wonders if we're likely to see any sign of real change

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**The foolishness of our day's ruling class day is epic in its proportions**  
.....

**I**f it feels to you a bit reminiscent of 1968 these days, that's because it is.

And that's a good thing.

It's starting to look like 2011 was the year of Basta!, when people finally woke up and found the voice with which to say Enough! To say that it comes in the nick of time is like saying that Rick Perry could afford to study a bit harder. In fact, this development is long overdue.

I don't see much evidence to suggest extensive linkage between the various national uprisings we're witnessing, or even much of a contagion effect – except perhaps in the Middle East – but nevertheless a host of countries have produced unprecedented popular dissent movements over the last year. In fairness, it's probably accurate to say that 2011 actually started in 2009 in Iran, but this year alone has seen major uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Bahrain, Greece, the UK, the US, and Israel, among others. Now, even Mother Russia has been added to the club, while China appears to continue along on something of a slow boil.

Such developments often come in generational waves. The events of 1989 might be an example, though they were more regional in nature, and were the product of a singular cause, the collapse of Soviet hegemony in its neighborhood. 1968 provides the better exemplar, when France and Mexico and the US and Czechoslovakia and

other countries rather spontaneously and rather separately experienced highly significant near-revolutions. Though the direct relationship between these respective events was rather tenuous, they shared a common ethos of a young generation rejecting the inheritance they were being offered by an older one whose core value system – rooted in materialism, war, prejudice, hypocrisy and multifarious forms of planetary destruction – was, oddly enough, increasingly found wanting.

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**Class foolishness**

It strikes me that we're seeing some of the very same sort of behavior today. That's no surprise. Indeed, the only shocker to me is that the response has taken so long, and that it continues to be so tame. The foolishness of our day's ruling class is epic in its proportions. As if that isn't bad enough, foolishness is actually a far too generous diagnosis. Like, say, a Newt Gingrich or a Barack Obama, these are not stupid people, and therefore the malady which besets us is far worse than some product of world class bumbling. More than anything, ours is time characterized by greed, on a scale which can only be compared to a Hitler or a Genghis Kahn, or other great historical predators. That may seem like a ridiculous stretch, but one look at the political mechanics behind

our policy indifference (on a good day) to the threat of global warming alone produces an indictment few figures in history can match. Add in the wars based on lies, the absence or dismantling of social programs in order to feed the greed of untaxed billionaires, the mortgaging of our children's futures to pay for the same, and more, and you've got a pretty grim bar tab the oligarchy has run up there.

Lucky for these agents of destruction that heaven and hell is just a myth to feed the little people they exploit so adroitly. It sure would be funny to watch what would happen if one of them actually started believing in that crap and felt compelled to do some serious truth telling, a la Bullworth. Well, funny, that is, for about five minutes, until that individual inevitably came to experience a rather inexplicable but nevertheless quite sudden and quite enduring absence of consciousness. Must have been something he ate. The Lobster Cyanide, perhaps.

I'd feel a lot better (which is far from saying good) about what they're doing to the rest of us if I thought they were mere idiots. It's just unbearable to me to know that our demise is instead the product of a combined greed and cynicism that is all but unfathomable in its scale. These sociopathic Masters of the Universe have learned just how easy it is to animate and motivate the pathetic army of clones amongst the hoi polloi to do their bidding and hand over all manner of riches to a one-tenth of one-percent who have long ago exceeded even the capacity to spend the additional sums. What mutant DNA or childhood trauma causes a billionaire to rabidly pursue further billions at the cost of millions of people's basic livelihood and dignity? And what missing CPU chips make it so easy for those millions to exchange their modest perch in the middle class for a nice war or two against a brown-skinned dictator who only yesterday was on the CIA payroll, or the warm feelings that come from some tasty racist, sexist or homophobic discrimination closer to home?

The mind fairly reels.

Ah, but here we are, nonetheless. It's quite amazing when you think about it. Just at the same moment when particle physicists are on the verge of unlocking the secrets of the Higgs Boson, you can still get tens of millions of slobbering American rednecks to dance in the streets over the prospects of murdering some poor mentally retarded SOB on death-row in Texas whose drunken lawyer slept through the trial, and whose appellate court 'justices' didn't see any harm in any of that. Did I mention that the individual in question was not part of the one percent?

At the same time, however, there is some good news, which is that such idiocy seems to fast be going the way of, say, the novelty of Paris Hilton. It's yesterday's titillation, today's embarrassment. Part of that, at the risk of being crass, is owing to pure generational replacement. Older people in America – as a generation, certainly not always as individuals – are simply more ignorant, malevolent and backward compared to their grandchildren, which would be more problematic than it is except for the fact that they are at least decent enough to be dying off.

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**Waiting for Grandpa**

Meanwhile, though, what makes 2011 is the growing sense that waiting for Grandpa Bucephelus to do the right thing and help heal the planet a bit by departing from it is no longer enough. Young people are staring down the business end of both barrels of a wholly bleak future right now, and – go figure – they're not happy about it. And, no, thank you very much, Mr. Perry, Ms. Bachmann and friends, they're not very interested in trading their quality of life for a blivet full of prejudices, phony wars, or some laughably contrary but far less laughably pernicious shuckster's moral lessons derived from the tribal skirmishes among certain Jordan river valley nomads thousands of years ago.

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**What mutant DNA or childhood trauma causes a billionaire to rabidly pursue further billions at the cost of millions of people's basic livelihood and dignity?**

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**If Americans ever had a one-person-one-vote system, they sure don't anymore**  
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Yeah, imagine that. You take a bunch of twenty year-olds, load them up with debt from all the misadventures and crimes that you (adding special circumstances to your original felony) refused to even pay for, show them a future of living at home with mom and dad while fighting amongst themselves for the honor of toiling away in an unpaid internship at some soul-numbing corporate palace of predation, and – surprise, surprise – they get a bit rowdy in response. Like I said, the only questions are why it's taken so long and why is the response so tame?

That latter question may grow moot over time, as it did, for example in Libya. Meanwhile, though, despite the seeming spontaneous and indigenous quality of each of these various national uprisings, it seems to me that they share three things in common.

First, the participants recognize an absence of real democracy in their governing structures. In some cases, such as Egypt's thirty year dictatorship complete with sham elections where HMFIC Mubarak would win over 90 percent of the vote, this is more obvious than in others. Like, say, for example, the American system, where sham elections instead consistently give more than 90 percent of the vote to the two wings of the same Corporate Party. Regardless of whether you have the choice between Tweedledee and Tweedledum, or are merely confined to voting for Tweedle D. Dumb alone, people everywhere seem to be recognizing that they in fact have no choice, and thus no democracy, at all. If Americans, for example, ever had a one-person-one-vote system, they sure don't anymore. Now it's strictly one-dollar-one-vote. Heads, corporate America gets subsidies, deregulation and externalized production costs; tails, you pay their taxes for them. Usually, though, it's heads and tails, at the same time.

Which brings us to the second characteristic that these cases have in common. It's not an accident that real democracy is off for an extended holiday in each of these coun-

tries. It must be, in order that the kleptocracies these nations have actually become can continue to function, largely unimpeded and uninterrupted. Turn your nose up in haughty disgust at Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe if you want (and you definitely should), but I've got some bad news for you. Bad Bob's ugly regime is only different in scale and overtness from those of Egypt, Russia or the United States. To choose what is merely the most prominent example, right now the United States spends more on its military than all the other countries of the world combined – that's nearly 200 nations, for those of you keeping score at home – and yet has no serious enemies anywhere on the horizon. Gee, I wonder why that is. Then there's the case of global warming, which appears to merely be the greatest threat to imperil the planet since the last massive meteor hit and wiped out most life on Earth. No biggie, though. I'm sure it's all just a massive coincidence that we're doing nothing about the collective future of ten billion people and the fact that filthy rich, well-connected fossil fuel peddling corporations would lose money if we did.

.....  
**Surveying the wreckage**

All of which leads to a third commonality in each of these cases, which is that of young people surveying the landscape of their future and being a whole lot less than excited about the wreckage they see already strewn thereupon. And what's not to like? Corporate loyalty to employees and lifetime tenure in good career jobs went out with the transistor radio. Public commitment to inexpensive quality education got real quaint real fast when investor bots like Mitt Romney figured out there was money to be made there. Thirty years of tax cuts for the wealthy have to be paid for, and those folks sure as hell not going to be doing it, leaving the tab to you and me instead. The one environment on the one planet we have has been knowingly pissed away by corporate

Strangeloves who have absolutely set the all-time world record for sociopathy. But, hey, so what if it's hot and stormy outside? These kids will be hunkered down in their parents' basements for the rest of their lives, anyhow, at least when they're not serving up double mocha lattes.

I am amazed at how long people stood by and watched these conditions develop, especially outside of thuggish dictatorships like Russia or Egypt, where dissent came with real and permanent risks to one's health. Shame on Americans, in particular, for being so stupid and lazy as to buy into the transparent lies and distractions of the Age of Reagan, and sacrifice their futures and those of their children in exchange for the occasional infantile satiation of their worst tendencies toward violence and bigotry. Aren't you glad we got Noriega, now, Billy Bob?!?! Isn't that satisfying, even though you don't have a job or a house anymore? And thank god the queers can't get married, eh?! Building a wall to keep Mexicans out sure is satisfying, isn't it? Yeah. Too bad, though, that we had to trade away the middle class for those seedy little thrills, and drive the country so far into the ditch that we actually solved our illegal immigration problem. Mexicans have literally stopped coming to the US because they can get as much jobless poverty as they want just by staying home, without the nasty demonization crap from drunken gringos trying to paper over their insecurities.

A recent piece in the *New York Times* summarizes our condition well: "In a Bertelsmann Foundation study on social justice released this fall, the United States came in dead last among the rich countries, with only Greece, Chile, Mexico and Turkey faring worse. Whether in poverty prevention, child poverty, income inequality or health ratings, the United States ranked below countries like Spain and South Korea, not to mention Japan, Germany or France. ... No nation has ever lost an existing middle class, and the United States is not in danger

of that yet. But the percentage of national income held by the top 1 percent of Americans went from about 10 percent in 1980 to 24 percent in 2007, and that is a worrisome signal."

But America's short-term future looks even more dismal than the present, if that is imaginable. The Republican presidential field this year could have stepped off the set of any B-rate Hollywood horror film. Or maybe "The Sting". True to form, a good half the candidates are straight-ahead shucksters, pure and simple, who have borrowed directly from the pioneering Sarah Palin's playbook. It turns out that you can make a boatload of money in Republican politics without actually having to do anything remotely onerous, like, say, knowing something about the issues (China has nukes?) or actually serving a full term in office. Two of these confidence men have actually been the GOP flavor of the month at some point this year (four, if you count Palin and Trump, who were so skilled at the game that they never even got in before getting out), and one of those two now looks like he's going to win the nomination.

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#### Gingrich speaks

Somebody (I wish it had been me) recently described Newt Gingrich as "a dumb person's idea of what a smart person sounds like", and boy is that ever the truth. He might also be understood as an amoral sociopath's idea of what a good person sounds like. You can get just about everything you need to know about Gingrich from this one exchange between him and Wife Number Two (of three, and counting) in an *Esquire* feature published last year:

"He asked her to just tolerate the affair, an offer she refused.

"He'd just returned from Erie, Pennsylvania, where he'd given a speech full of high sentiments about compassion and family values.

"The next night, they sat talking out on

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**Somebody recently described Newt Gingrich as "a dumb person's idea of what a smart person sounds like", and boy is that ever the truth**  
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**Reagan got elected, in part, because he promised to kill more foreigners than Carter would. No joke**  
.....

their back patio in Georgia. She said, ‘How do you give that speech and do what you’re doing?’

“‘It doesn’t matter what I do,’ he answered. ‘People need to hear what I have to say. There’s no one else who can say what I can say. It doesn’t matter what I live.’”

It’s worth noting, by the way, that Gingrich had asked his third wife to marry him before telling his second wife that he was having an affair and wanted a divorce, and that this repeated the pattern of how he left his first wife. But now he’s Mr. Faithful, Mr. Pious and Mr. Moral, lecturing the rest of us on proper codes of ethical behavior. This from a guy who proposes scrapping child labor laws. This from a guy who would deny the Palestinian people even the essence of their identity in order to pander yet further to the Likud Lobby and its stranglehold over American politics. This from a guy who – as Barney Frank rightly notes – is more or less singlehandedly responsible for the poisoning of the well of American political discourse these last two decades. This from a guy who ditched his first wife on her hospital bed as she was recovering from cancer surgery, so that he could marry the woman with whom he had been having an affair.

What kills me is that tens of millions of Americans could want to put this obviously tortured soul in the White House, drooling, chanting and hollering in response every invocation of violence and hatred he casually tosses out like so many rhetorical hand grenades. But then this is the nature of our politics. There is this incredibly sick segment of the country – people who look to politics as a chance to vindicate their resentments, justify their hatreds and exonerate their stupidity – and the contest among the GOP candidates is to find the individual who can throw them the most red meat. If you’ve watched the crowd response at any of the debates these lot have been conducting the last few months, you know exactly what I’m talking about. But it’s been there a good long while. Reagan got elected, in part,

because he promised to kill more foreigners than Carter would. No joke. Lil’ Bush ‘won’ his first term (as did Clinton, in part) pretty much on his record as a proud and overt serial murderer of Texas death-row inmates. Then, this dress-up-macho Vietnam coward ‘won’ his second term by out tough-guying a dude who actually did fight in a real war, or at least Bush did so in the minds of these very unwell Republican voters, whose capacity to grapple with the cognitive dissonance driven by avalanches of pesky factual data makes Lindsay Lohan look like a paragon of mental health by comparison.

.....  
**Stupidity threshold**

So there is every chance that Brute Thing-Itch might be the next American president. I thought for sure it would be Tough Guy Rick Perry, instead, but GOP voters surprised me by demonstrating that they actually do have a stupidity threshold of some sorts. It’s perfectly fine to tell them the most obscene lies (like where Palin says she reads “all” them journal thingies, or when Mutt emphatically changes his position on everything imaginable). You just can’t reveal that you’re as dumb as a Texas governor (even if you are one) on national TV by doing that deer in the headlights thing. If you’re gonna list three things, well godammit, you need to come up with more than two. (Christ, Fool, just make them up if you need to! Like that would be so out of character for a GOP politician or voter.)

Anyhow, call it tough love if you want, but Republican voters appear to have their standards, and Oh-Shit-I-Left-My-Brain-Back-At-The-Ranch-(Again) Perry doesn’t seem to meet them. I guess when national politics is part of your personal mechanism for avoiding embarrassment, it’s important that your candidate not play the drunken fool in front of millions...

Anyhow, it now looks like Fig Newton could well be standing on the inaugural platform in January of 2013, and I’m not even



sure that's a bad thing in the short term or the long term. I'll be delighted to see Obama humiliated and destroyed, for one thing. My antipathy toward him (and Bill Clinton) in many ways surpasses that for the GOP lineup of thugs and bugs.

All of the above have the same fundamental commitments to the same cadre of ruling plutocrats, but Obama and Clinton have also managed to destroy the New Deal Democratic Party and the reputation of progressivism in the bargain. And their deceptions have been all the more treasonous because of the millions of progressives (including loads of young people, politically mobilized for the first and possibly last time in 2008) whose idealism, compassion and genuine love of country they've so callously trampled upon.

.....  
**Just deserts**

On the other hand, now that Obama is ramping up the Big Lie machine once again, many of those people will get just what they deserve. What was that line Bush mumbled about fooling me twice? I'm astonished to see progressives gearing up to be abused a second time by Obama – who is all of a sudden sounding like a progressive again – like they've walked right out of a Stockholm Syndrome field manual or something. Are we talking about the same guy here? The one who put the actual bandits who wrecked the economy in his cabinet? The one who has not prosecuted a single Wall Street banker? The one who bailed those thieves out, but has done nothing remotely serious for the unemployed and homeowners? The one who pretends to fold in every negotiation with Republicans? The one whose staff regularly disses progressives?

That guy? Hey, liberal idiots. I have a question for you. Do you really think this bastard is going to become FDR in his second term? Do you really think he's going to seriously slash military funding in order to save Medicare? Do you really think he's go-

ing to rescind his deal with the insurance industry in order to provide genuine public health care access? Do you really think he's going to replace Timothy Geithner with Paul Krugman or Joseph Stiglitz? I mean, this is a guy so beholden to Wall Street that he pretended not to have the courage to nominate Elizabeth Warren to the new consumer affairs position she invented. Are you really going to be wooed by him again? If so, if you're so easily abused by your political class, you might as well line up to be Newt's fourth wife for all the street smarts you're displaying.

This country – and likely this global economy – are going to have to go through a shitstorm over the next two or three years, and in many ways I'd much rather have some GOP jerk in the White House to make things worse and get the blame than another four years of Half-a-Bama, carrying water for Wall Street while dissipating the anger of stupid liberals who cannot recognize their own enemy just because he puts 'D' after his name, and especially if he does so while being black.

We have to get to the point of utter rejection of kleptocratic politics in this country, and the way I see it, a second Obama term drowns that process in molasses, while the sure to be utterly egregious Gingrich could instead be the perfect lightning rod to fully energize the street. The guy is a disaster in every way imaginable, and is a plague I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy (that would probably be Gingrich, anyhow), but right now he might be just the chemotherapy needed for a very, very sick country.

Yes, we'll lose our hair and vomit continuously.

But perhaps we'll finally destroy the cancer of greed which has metastasized in the American body politic. **CT**

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*David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. More of his work can be found at his website, [www.regressiveantidote.net](http://www.regressiveantidote.net)*

.....  
**You might as well line up to be Newt's fourth wife for all the street smarts you're displaying**

# Ten questions for Mr Hague

Britain's foreign secretary should be trying to make friends, not enemies, says **Stuart Littlewood**

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Have we so easily forgotten the cruel and devastating effect of sanctions on civil society, especially children, before we reduced Iraq to rubble?  
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Britain's foreign secretary William Hague has written a widely acclaimed 576-page biography of William Pitt the Younger, who became prime minister in 1783 at the tender age of 24. Pitt was the war leader during Britain's running battles with Napoleon, but it is said that he was uncomfortable in such a role and considered war got in the way of trade and prosperity.

It is a pity that Pitt's abhorrence of war and preference for trade has not, apparently, rubbed off on Hague. We see our foreign secretary rushing around the international stage drumming up support for sanctions intended to cripple another country – a country that could and should have been a strong trading partner and valuable ally – on the mere suspicion of some nuclear skulduggery. And he does this without adequate debate, sensible explanation or popular mandate.

Mr Hague said the recent ransacking of the embassy in Tehran was carried out “with regime consent”. But I read that US Vice President Joe Biden told Reuters that he had no indication the attack was orchestrated by the Iranian authorities.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the incident was clearly in retaliation for Britain's leading part in orchestrating sanctions that will damage the Iranian economy and collectively punish the country's civilian population. To this is added a burning resentment of Britain's past sins.

Perhaps Mr Hague should pause to reflect and answer a few questions...

(1) Have we so easily forgotten the cruel and devastating effect of sanctions on civil society, especially children, before we reduced Iraq to rubble?

(2) Would the Foreign Secretary kindly explain the reasons for his hostility towards Iran?

(3) What concrete proof is there of Iran's military application of nuclear technology?

(4) Why is he not more concerned about Israel's nuclear arsenal, the threat it poses to the region and beyond, and the mental attitude of the Israeli regime?

(5) Why is he not seeking sanctions against Israel for its refusal to sign up to the NPT or engage constructively on the issue of its nuclear and other WMD programmes, not to mention its repeated defiance of in-



ternational and humanitarian laws in the Holy Land?

(6) How many times has a British foreign secretary visited Tehran in the 32 years since the Islamic Revolution?

(7) Did Mr Hague make the effort before embarking on his punitive programme?

(8) Britain's abominable conduct towards the Iranians in 1951-53 when a previous Conservative government, in cahoots with the USA, snuffed out Iran's democracy and reinstated a cruel dictator, the Shah, was largely responsible for bringing about the Islamic Revolution and setting the pattern of future relationships. Is it not shameful that this Conservative government is spoiling for another fight? Shouldn't the Foreign Office focus on exerting influence through trade and co-operation?

(9) Iran's administration, like many others, may not be to our liking but nor was Dr Mossadeq's democracy 60 years ago. In any event, what threat is Iran to Britain? And why is Mr Hague leading the charge?

(10) By pulling our people out of Tehran and kicking Iran's people out of London Mr Hague has shut the door on diplomacy. How can he now communicate effectively and build bridges with a nation he seems determined to goad into becoming an implacable enemy?

#### Whose interest?

It is difficult to understand how this escalation against Iran is in the British national interest. Do the British people want it? If Mr Hague's purpose is to help preserve the balance of power in the Middle East so that a lawless, racist regime – Israel – remains

the dominant threatening military force, he must be called to explain the wisdom of it.

Messrs Hague and Cameron both voted enthusiastically for the Iraq war, a supremely irresponsible decision based on neo-con lies. It has cost well over a million lives and caused utter ruination for the survivors and the destruction of much of their heritage. What possessed us to go to war on shoddy intelligence and inflict shock and awe on good people?

We want no repetition.

William Hague, according to the *Jewish Chronicle*, told David Cameron when he became Conservative party leader in 2005 that a deep understanding of the Middle East would be crucial if he wished to be taken seriously as a statesman. "We have to be steeped in the Middle East, way back to historical matters. Because you can't understand it without the history. That's been one of the failings sometimes with the Western governments."

In which case the pair of them ought to know better.

A reminder to the foreign secretary seems appropriate. Most people realise that Westminster's neo-con friends in Washington have war with Iran on their agenda. But Mr Hague's job is to make friends for Britain not enemies.

Genuine friends in the Middle East are becoming scarce, millions more innocent people may die and the cost of oil is likely to rocket if the West's aggressive tactics and double standards continue. **CT**

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*Stuart Littlewood's book "Radio Free Palestine" can now be read on the internet by visiting [www.radiofreepalestine.org.uk](http://www.radiofreepalestine.org.uk)*

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**The images of idealistic young people being thrown on the ground, hammered with batons, and sprayed in the face with pepper spray, are deeply upsetting to most ordinary people**  
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# A murky, perilous game

Barry Lando looks at the lessons of recent Middle Eastern history

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We know from President George H.W. Bush's decision to fund the opposition to Saddam Hussein in 1991 that once such a program is launched it takes on a life of its own  
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The downing of a sophisticated US RQ-170 Sentinel drone over Iran is the latest ratcheting of tension among Washington, Tehran and Jerusalem. Iran's nuclear enrichment facilities have been crippled by sophisticated cyber attacks. Key Iranian scientists and officials have been killed, including a senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander who died when a rocket research site was hit by a spectacular and still unexplained explosion.

That we know. But what else is going on in this murky, dangerous game?

In July 2008, Seymour Hersh reported in the *New Yorker* that in the previous year the US Congress agreed to a request from President George W. Bush "to fund a major escalation of covert operations against Iran, according to current and former military, intelligence and congressional sources. These operations, for which the president sought up to \$400 million, were described in a Presidential Finding signed by Bush, and are designed to destabilize the country's religious leadership. The covert activities involve support of the minority Ahwazi Arab and Baluchi groups and other dissident

organizations. They also include gathering intelligence about Iran's suspected nuclear-weapons program."

That American backing included support for actions, which, were they to be committed against the United States or one of its allies, would definitely qualify as "terrorism."

Has the support for such operations continued under President Obama? If so, what does it include? Just financial backing? Training? Logistics? Clandestine raids into Iran? American "boots on the ground"?

Predictably, such aggressive acts will provoke retaliation from Iran – a situation that in the context of America's superheated presidential primaries could spiral dangerously out of control. Which is just what militants in Tehran, Jerusalem and Washington may be out to

provoke.

We know from President George H.W. Bush's decision to fund the opposition to Saddam Hussein in 1991 that once such a program is launched it takes on a life of its own – extremely tricky to control, even more difficult to shut down by succeeding presidents, as Bill Clinton would discover. The funding created its own lobby, ready to



run to the media and sympathetic congressman at any attempt to rein it in.

Such a potentially explosive situation would be nothing new. Washington has already been involved in a much more violent clandestine war against Iran, via its de facto ally of the time, Saddam Hussein, who invaded Iran in 1980.

From early in the conflict, the US secretly supplied Saddam with arms as well as satellite intelligence. By 1987, Washington was shipping American-made weapons directly to Iraq from the sprawling US Rhein-Main Air Base in Frankfurt, Germany. Some of Saddam's elite troops were even being sent to the United States for instruction in unconventional warfare by US Special Forces at Fort Bragg.

As I detail in my book, *Web of Deceit*, the Reagan administration would be dangerously sucked even deeper into the conflict. Encouraged by the US, Saddam intensified his attacks against vital Iranian economic targets, including neutral tankers in the Gulf. Iran, of course, retaliated. Concerned about the safety of their own ships, the Kuwaitis asked for protection.

Some US officials worried back then – just as they do today – that by venturing into the narrow confines of the Gulf, the US risked direct conflict with Iran. Despite such concerns, American warships were dispatched.

### Dangerous games

In May 1987, it became dramatically clear how dangerous that policy was. An Iraqi Air Force plane mistakenly attacked an American frigate, the USS. Stark, killing 37 of the crew.

Then, to counter mounting congressional opposition to the operation, the Reagan administration decided to go one step further. It would justify a continued US presence in the Gulf by permitting Kuwaiti ships to operate under the American flag.

That fiction would give the Kuwaitis the

right to American protection.

A US liaison officer was stationed in Baghdad to avoid a repeat of the Stark incident.

That, at least, was the cover story; in fact, over the following months, American officers would help Iraq carry out long-range strikes against key Iranian targets, using US ships as navigational aids. "We became," as one senior US officer told ABC's Nightline, "forward air controllers for the Iraqi Air Force."

The Reagan administration, in effect, decided to undertake a secret war, not bothering with congressional authorization.

Heavily armed US Special Operations helicopters, stealthy, sophisticated killing machines that could operate by day or night, were ordered to the Persian Gulf. Their mission was to destroy any Iranian gunboats they could find. Other small, swift American vessels, posing as commercial ships, lured Iranian naval vessels into international waters to attack them. The Americans often claimed they attacked the Iranian ships only after the Iranians first menaced neutral ships plying the Gulf. In some cases however, the neutral ships that the Americans claimed to be defending didn't even exist.

Beginning in July 1987, the CIA also began sending covert spy planes and helicopters over Iranian bases. Several engaged in secret bombing runs, at one point destroying an Iranian warehouse full of mines. In September 1987, a special operations helicopter team attacked an Iranian mine-laying ship with a hail of rockets and machine-gun fire, killing three Iranian sailors. Official authorization for those clandestine attacks was purposely restricted to a low level in the Reagan administration so that top government officials could deny all knowledge of the illegal operations.

By early 1988, officers from the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency dispatched to Baghdad were actually planning day-by-day strategic bombing strikes for the Iraqi Air Force. In April 1988, the day

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**An Iraqi Air Force plane mistakenly attacked an American frigate, the USS. Stark, killing 37 of the crew**  
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"We were prepared, I would say at the time, to drill them back to the fourth century"  
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before a key Iraqi offensive, US forces sank or demolished half the Iranian navy – one destroyer and a couple of frigates.

If Saddam had not ultimately prevailed, the Pentagon had prepared an even more ambitious strategy: to launch an attack against the Iranian mainland. "The real plans were for a secret war, with the US on the side of Iraq against Iran, on a daily basis," retired Lt. Col. Roger Charles, who was serving in the office of the secretary of defense at the time, told British reporter Alan Friedman.

As Adm. James A. "Ace" Lyons, who was commander in chief of the US Pacific Fleet put it, "We were prepared, I would say at the time, to drill them back to the fourth century."

Relatively cooler heads prevailed. According to Richard L. Armitage, who at the time was assistant secretary of defense, "The decision was made not to completely obliterate Iran. We didn't want a naked Iran. We wanted a calm, quiet peaceful Iran. However, had things not gone well in the Gulf, I've no doubt that we would have put those plans into effect."

Which brings us back to today. **CT**

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**Barry M. Lando** spent 25 years as an award-winning investigative producer with the TV program *60 Minutes*. He has produced numerous articles, a documentary and a book, "Web of Deceit", about Iraq. Lando is just finishing a novel, "The Watchman's File"

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## HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt





# Empires don't apologise

Tom Burghardt on the biggest, costliest, most overgrown warfare machine ever created, that is poised to attack any point on the planet

After first denying that the Iranian military had captured the CIA's RQ-170 Sentinel spy drone, and then reluctantly acknowledging the fact only after PressTV aired footage of the killer bot, the Associated Press reported that "the Obama administration said Monday it has delivered a formal request to Iran" that they return it.

"We have asked for it back," Obama said. "We'll see how the Iranians respond."

A huge embarrassment to the CIA and the Pentagon, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told reporters during a State Department briefing: "We submitted a formal request for the return of our lost equipment as we would in any situation to any government around the world."

Cheekily, Clinton said although the US government has little prospect of getting their \$6 million toy back because of "recent Iranian behavior," she then threatened the Islamic Republic saying, "the path that Iran seems to be going down is a dangerous one for themselves and the region."

In Washington's bizarre world where war is peace the United States, which has Iran surrounded with a string of military bases

and where nuclear-armed aircraft carrier battle groups and submarines ply the waters of the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, the aggressor is magically transformed into the aggrieved party.

The Secretary said, "given Iran's behavior to date we do not expect them to comply *but we are dealing with all of these provocations and concerning actions* taken by Iran in close concert with our closest allies and partners." (emphasis added)

Talk about chutzpah!

Firing back, the head of Iran's Judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani told PressTV that "the US has violated our country's territory and has waged an intelligence war, and now expects us to return the aircraft."

Noting the absurdity of US demands Larijani said, "Iran has the right to deal with this blatant crime in any way [it deems necessary] and the US should forget about getting the spy aircraft back."

By all accounts, the "intelligence war" is heating up. On Thursday, Haaretz reported that the "Israel Defense Forces is forming a command to supervise 'depth' operations, actions undertaken by the military far from Israel's borders."

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**With few exceptions, corporate media in Europe and the US have played accessory roles in ginning-up the so-called “Iranian threat”**  
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In a follow-up piece published Sunday, Haaretz informed us that the new corps, “has already earned the somewhat overstated sobriquet ‘the Iran Command.’”

The newspaper’s chief military correspondent, Amos Harel, wrote that the new unit “could, in the future, assist in mobilizing special forces in the Iranian context.”

“More important,” Harel averred, “it will have the job of planning and leading operations in areas far beyond the borders, operations that are connected to the covert war against terror organizations (and, indirectly, against Iran).”

Whether the IDF’s newly-launched “Iran Command,” will prove any more effective than the CIA or Mossad, which suffered major set-backs when their intelligence nets were rolled-up in Iran and Lebanon as Asia Times Online recently reported, is an open question. War “by other means” however, will continue.

The US House of Representatives passed by a vote of 283-136 the Iran Threat Reductions Act (H.R. 1905), a draconian piece of legislative detritus which hopes to crater Iran’s Central Bank. The following day, the US Senate followed suit, approving the legislation by an 86-13 vote. President Obama has said he would sign the bill, cobbled-together by war hawks as part of the massive \$670 billion 2012 Defense Authorization Act.

.....  
**Spinning the story**

US military and CIA operations today involve far more than simply “putting steel on the target.” Increasingly, covert actions and clandestine operations rely on what the Pentagon has described as “information operations.”

With few exceptions, corporate media in Europe and the US have played accessory roles in ginning-up the so-called “Iranian threat,” a decades’ long program to secure hegemony over the energy-rich regions of Central Asia and the Middle East.

When initial reports surfaced that the drone had gone missing deep inside Iran,

“CIA press officials declined to comment on the downed drone and reporters were directed toward a statement from the military,” the *Washington Post* reported.

Indeed, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the NATO-led alliance currently occupying Afghanistan, dismissed Iran’s claims that the drone was operating over their territory. “The UAV to which the Iranians are referring may be a US unarmed reconnaissance aircraft that had been flying a mission over western Afghanistan late last week,” the ISAF statement read.

Deep inside the media echo chamber, CNN informed us last month that the drone had been “tasked to fly over western Afghanistan and look for insurgent activity, with no directive to either fly into Iran or spy on Iran from Afghan airspace.”

“A US satellite quickly pinpointed the downed drone, which apparently sustained significant damage,” the “senior official” told the network.

CNN quoted the unnamed “senior official” as saying, “the Iranians have a pile of rubble and are trying to figure what they have and what to do with it.” According to this reading, “the drone crashed solely because its guidance system failed, the official said.”

While first claiming that the CIA drone had strayed off-course, CNN reported after the Sentinel was publicly displayed, that unnamed “US military officials” re-calibrated their tale and now said that the drone “was on a surveillance mission of suspected nuclear sites” in Iran.

Anonymous officials told CNN that “the CIA had not informed the Defense Department of the drone’s mission when reports first emerged that it had crashed,” and that the US military “did not have a good understanding of what was going on because it was a CIA mission.”

As with their earlier reporting, CNN’s latest explanation was a fabrication.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported two days after the incident, “though the drone flight was a CIA operation, US military personnel

were involved in flying the aircraft, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the secrecy involved.”

In fact, as the *Washington Post* disclosed in September, the CIA and the Pentagon’s Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) are thick as thieves.

“Their commingling at remote bases is so complete, the *Post* informed us, “that US officials ranging from congressional staffers to high-ranking CIA officers said they often find it difficult to distinguish agency from military personnel.”

“You couldn’t tell the difference between CIA officers, Special Forces guys and contractors,” an unnamed “senior US official” told the *Post*. “They’re all three blended together. All under the command of the CIA.”

“Their activities occupy an expanding netherworld between intelligence and military operations.” One can presume that these “blended” units have been tasked by Washington with the “Iranian brief.”

“Sometimes their missions are considered military ‘preparation of the battlefield,’” the *Post* reported, “and others fall under covert findings obtained by the CIA. As a result, congressional intelligence and armed services committees rarely get a comprehensive view,” which of course is precisely what the Agency and Pentagon fully intend.

In light of recent statements by US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to the *New York Times*, that “surveillance flights over Iran would continue despite the loss of the drone,” reporting by US media stenographers, are blatant misrepresentations of the basic facts surrounding the entire affair. (emphasis added)

Now sensing the jig was up and that a face-saving meme had to be injected into the news cycle, a “former intelligence official” continued to discount Iranian assertions that their armed forces had brought the drone down. “It simply fell into their laps,” he told CNN.

However, much to the consternation of American officials, Iranian spin doctors were

running their own info op, one which cast US claims in a most unflattering light.

The Associated Press reported that “Iran deliberately delayed its announcement that it had captured an American surveillance drone to test US reaction, the country’s foreign minister said Saturday.”

“Ali Akbar Salehi said Tehran finally went public with its possession of the RQ-170 Sentinel stealth drone to disprove contradictory statements from US officials,” AP reported.

“When our armed forces nicely brought down the stealth American surveillance drone, we didn’t announce it for several days to see what the other party (US) says and to test their reaction,” Salehi told the official IRNA news agency. “Days after Americans made contradictory statements, our friends at the armed forces put this drone on display.” Unlike American and Israeli assertions that Iran is taking steps to “go nuclear,” Iranian officials at least had hard evidence on their side that the United States was violating their territorial integrity – the captured US drone.

#### Electronic countermeasures

Although Western “defense experts” have ridiculed claims that Iran’s electronic warfare specialists have captured the Sentinel rather than recovering the downed craft from a crash site, a report by the *Christian Science Monitor* shed new light on Iran’s apparent capabilities.

Investigative journalists Scott Peterson and Payam Faramarzi disclosed that an Iranian engineer now working on the captured drone, said that the military “exploited a known vulnerability and tricked the US drone into landing in Iran.”

According to the *Monitor*, “Iran guided the CIA’s ‘lost’ stealth drone to an intact landing inside hostile territory by exploiting a navigational weakness long-known to the US military.”

Earlier reports suggested that Iran, which had recently been supplied with the Russian-

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**Unlike America and Israel, Iranian officials at least had hard evidence on their side that the United States was violating their territorial integrity – the captured US drone**  
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Iraqi insurgents battling the US occupation had deployed \$26 off-the-shelf spy kit which enabled them to intercept live video feeds from Predator drones

built Kvant 1L222 Avtobaza Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) systems, may have been a factor in the drone’s capture.

The Israeli defense industry publication, Defense Update, informed us that the Avtobaza is “capable of intercepting weapon datalink communications operating on similar wavebands. The new gear may have helped the Iranians employ active deception/jamming to intercept and ‘hijack’ the Sentinel’s control link.”

The *Monitor* investigation however, suggests that the Iranians had accomplished this feat on their own. Regardless of the means employed, statements by US officials that all the Iranians had was “a pile of rubble” were blatant falsehoods.

According to the *Monitor*, Iran’s military experts were able to do so by cutting off “communications links of the American bat-wing RQ-170 Sentinel, says the engineer, who works for one of many Iranian military and civilian teams currently trying to unravel the drone’s stealth and intelligence secrets, and who could not be named for his safety.”

Armed with knowledge “gleaned from previous downed American drones and a technique proudly claimed by Iranian commanders in September, Peterson and Faramarzi disclosed that “the Iranian specialists then reconfigured the drone’s GPS coordinates to make it land in Iran at what the drone thought was its actual home base in Afghanistan.”

It would seem then, if this account is accurate, that Iranian defense experts had already “figure[d] out what they have and what to do with it” from earlier captures. “The GPS navigation is the weakest point,” the Iranian engineer said. “By putting noise [jamming] on the communications, you force the bird into autopilot. This is where the bird loses its brain.”

Once military engineers had “spoofed” the American drone, “which took into account precise landing altitudes, as well as latitudinal and longitudinal data,” they were able to make “the drone ‘land on its own where we wanted it to, without having to crack the

remote-control signals and communications’ from the US control center.”

Peterson and Faramarzi reported that the techniques employed “were developed from reverse-engineering several less sophisticated American drones captured or shot down in recent years,” as well as by taking advantage “of weak, easily manipulated GPS signals, which calculate location and speed from multiple satellites.”

Former US Navy electronic warfare specialist Robert Densmore told the *Monitor* that “modern combat-grade GPS [is] very susceptible’ to manipulation,” saying it is “certainly possible” to “recalibrate the GPS on a drone so that it flies on a different course.”

As *Antifascist Calling* reported in 2009, Iraqi insurgents battling the US occupation had deployed \$26 off-the-shelf spy kit which enabled them to intercept live video feeds from Predator drones. What the Iranians claim to have done, according to defense experts, are orders of magnitude greater than simply capturing a video feed. Indeed, if this report is credible, it would have wide-reaching implications for other US, Israeli and NATO aircraft and missiles which similarly rely on GPS to guide them towards their targets.

Why is this the case? As WikiLeaks revealed in a 2009 report on the earlier Iraqi revelations that “it is theoretically possible to read off this [drone] mission control data both in the intercepted video feed and saved video data on hard disks.”

In plain English, this means that the “control and command link to communicate from a control station to the drone” and the “data link that sends mission control data and video feeds back to the ground control station,” for both “line-of-sight communication paths and beyond line-of-sight communication paths” are hackable by whomever might be listening.

**Leaked Pentagon Document**

On December 13, the secret-shredding web

site Public Intelligence, published a leaked US Air Force document, USAF Operating Next-Generation Remotely Piloted Aircraft for Irregular Warfare, SAB-TR-10-03, dated April 2011.

Classified “For Official Use Only,” the 110-page report issued by the United States Air Force Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), revealed that drones or “remotely piloted aircraft” (RPA) are subject to a number of vulnerabilities.

Air Force analysts averred that “in spite of current low RPA losses, inexpensive physical threats (e.g., MANPADS, low-end SAMs, air-to-air missiles) and electronic threats (e.g., acoustic detectors, low cost acquisition radars, jammers) threaten future operations.”

Relevantly, “sensor/data downlinks for some RPAs have not been encrypted or obfuscated.”

However, the RQ-170 Sentinel, which can operate at 50,000 feet would not have been vulnerable to “MANPADS” or “low-end SAMs,” and was certainly not brought down by an Iranian air-to-air missile; therefore, a valid explanation of its capture would be the one offered by Iran: electronic countermeasures developed by the Islamic Republic.

Amongst the more salient findings of the Air Force report are the following:

#### **Section 2.4.3 Threat to Communication Links**

1. Jamming of commercial satellite communications (SATCOM) links is a widely available technology. It can provide an effective tool for adversaries against data links or as a way for command and control (C2) denial.

2. Operational needs may require the use of unencrypted data links to provide broadcast services to ground troops without security clearances. Eavesdropping on these links is a known exploit that is available to adversaries for extremely low cost.

3. Spoofing or hijacking links can lead to damaging missions, or even to platform loss.

#### **Section 2.4.4 Threat to Position, Navigation, and Guidance**

1. Small, simple GPS noise jammers can be easily constructed and employed by an unsophisticated adversary and would be effective over a limited RPA operating area.

2. GPS repeaters are also available for corrupting navigation capabilities of RPAs.

3. Cyber threats represent a major challenge for future RPA operations. Cyber attacks can affect both on-board and ground systems, and exploits may range from asymmetric CNO [computer network operation] attacks to highly sophisticated electronic systems and software attacks.

Jeffrey Carr, a US cybersecurity expert who maintains the *Digital Dao* web site wrote that the timing of document’s release to Public Intelligence was “very interesting.”

“Clearly,” Carr wrote, “someone with FOUO access wanted this information to be made public to inform the controversy surrounding the incident.”

Commenting on the Air Force report, Carr averred that “the capture of the RQ-170 by Iranian forces needs to be evaluated fairly and not dismissed as some kind of Iranian scam for reasons that have more to do with embarrassment than a rational assessment of the facts.”

“Theft of this technology via cyber attacks against the companies doing R&D and manufacture of the aircraft is ongoing,” Carr noted.

“Whether or not the Iranians got lucky or have acquired the ability to attack the C2 of the drone in question, there’s obviously some serious errors in judgment being made at very high levels and secrecy about it is only serving the ones guilty of making those bad decisions.”

While Carr’s observations are true as far as it goes, the “serious errors in judgement” begin with chest-thumping US and Israeli politicians who believe they have a monopoly when it comes to dictating policies or invading other countries, killing people on an industrial scale, stealing their resources and

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 “There’s obviously some serious errors in judgment being made at very high levels and secrecy about it is only serving the ones guilty of making those bad decisions”  
 .....



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If Iranian  
assertions are  
accurate, a  
technological leap  
such as this would  
pose a serious  
threat to any  
attacking force  
.....

reducing their cities to smoking ruins as was done in both Gaza and Fallujah.

To make matters worse for technophilic Western militaries hell-bent on attacking Iran, *Tehran Times* reported that “Iran plans to put foreign spy drones it has in its possession on display in the near future.”

According to unnamed sources quoted by the newspaper, which reflects the views of the Iranian government, “the foreign unmanned aircraft that Iran has are four Israeli and three US drones.”

Back in September, The Christian Science *Monitor* disclosed, “Gen. Moharam Gholizadeh, the deputy for electronic warfare at the air defense headquarters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), described to *Fars News* how Iran could alter the path of a GPS-guided missile – a tactic more easily applied to a slower-moving drone.”

According to Peterson and Faramarzi, Gholizadeh told the news agency that “we have a project on hand that is one step ahead of jamming, meaning ‘deception’ of the aggressive systems,” ... such that “we can define our own desired information for it so the path of the missile would change to our desired destination.”

While it is not possible to verify these claims, indeed they may be nothing more than propaganda offerings from Iranian spinmeisters, if their assertions are accurate, a technological leap such as this would pose a serious threat to any attacking force.

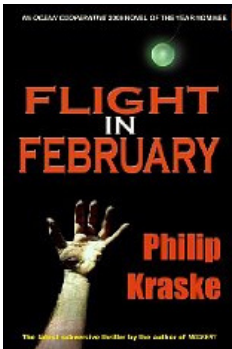
As I wrote back in 2009, since cheap and readily-obtainable software packages were now part of the spy-kit of Iraqi insurgent forces, I wondered whether it was “only a matter of time before militant groups figure out how to hijack a drone and crash it, or even launch a Hellfire missile or two at a US ground station?”

We were told by military experts this was not possible; however, who would have dreamed that the Achilles’ heel of Pentagon robo-warriors, blinded by their own arrogance and racist presumptions about the “Arab” or “Persian mind” was something as simple as their own imperial hubris. **CT**

.....  
**Tom Burghardt** is a researcher and activist based in the San Francisco Bay Area.

He is the editor of “Police State America: US Military ‘Civil Disturbance’ Planning”, distributed by AK Press. He blogs at <http://antifascist-calling.blogspot.com>

*“Kraske’s command of plot, dialog and character is staggering. Whatever he puts his pen to, whether essay or fiction, makes for a great read” – ColdType*



## FLIGHT IN FEBRUARY

Did drug-trafficker Marcus Strenk escape from Minnesota’s maximum-security prison during a blizzard – or die trying? Deputy Marshal Henry Scott believes that Strenk found a way past the highly sophisticated security system and made it to freedom. But the search Scott puts into gear is quickly spiked by Alec Barkley, the very FBI agent who had put Strenk in jail – spiked, that is, until Strenk’s cheery note from outside arrives at the prison. Barkley puts every available agent on the manhunt. Henry Scott meanwhile examines Barkley’s earlier espionage operation against Strenk’s Mexican connections – and ends up stepping through the looking glass. ( Read the first chapter at <http://www.philipkraske.com/index.php?id=63> )

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# Why do they hate us?

Dave Lindorff on hypocrisy, double dealing and military meddling

Even as President Obama and War Secretary Leon Panetta announced the “end” of the Iraq War, the *National Journal* December 4 article, a US “covert war” against Iran has already begun.

This secret war – at least secret from the American people – is being conducted in part directly by the US, as evidenced by the advanced American RQ-170 Sentinel stealth surveillance drone recently downed – apparently by sophisticated electronic countermeasures that allowed the taking control of, and landing of the vehicle – by Iran. Also conducted in part by proxies, including the Iranian anti-government terrorist organization MEK (for Mujahideen-e Khalq), and of course Israel’s Mossad, this dirty covert war has led to an escalating string of acts of terror inside Iran, including a campaign of assassination against Iranian nuclear scientists, and bombings of Iranian military installations.

Not content to simply engage in such illegal hostilities against a sovereign nation that has not threatened the US, and that in fact has not invaded another country in some 200 years, President Obama had the effrontery to demand that the Iranians return the spy drone that they had captured!

Imagine for a moment if an Iranian, or some other nation’s, robot spy plane had been captured or shot down over US territory. Imagine the official response if the nation that owned that plane were to demand its return! First of all, Congress members, probably almost unanimously, would be clamoring for the US to launch an attack on whatever company launched the spy plane. But the reaction to a demand to return such a device would be truly explosive! The audacity!

Actually, you don’t need to imagine. Look at the right-wing media and the official US government response to the arrest of two men in New York accused of the hard-to-believe conspiracy of planning, allegedly at the direction of Iranian government sources, to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States. Forget about proving that this far-fetched alleged plot was real at all,

and not just another creation of some FBI informant/provocateur, or whether Iran was really behind it even if it was. There were open calls for bombing Iran immediately!

President Obama, meanwhile, keeps saying that “all options are on the table” for dealing with what the US government alleges is an

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**This dirty covert war has led to an escalating string of acts of terror inside Iran, including a campaign of assassination against Iranian nuclear scientists, and bombings of Iranian military installations**  
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**Someday there will come a reckoning for the US, as there came a reckoning for Rome, for the British Empire, for the German Reich and for the USSR**  
.....

Iranian campaign to develop nuclear weapons – itself a very dubious claim. And to back up that threat, the US has actually delivered huge non-nuclear “bunker busting” bombs to Israel, a country which has openly been discussing plans to attack Iran. These are all war crimes under the UN charter and actual acts of war.

But that’s just Iran. The US is already at war with Pakistan, too, their nominal ally in the war against Afghanistan’s Taliban. Two weeks ago, American planes, ground forces and helicopters attacked two Pakistani border posts, killing several dozen Pakistani troops. There is considerable evidence that these attacks were deliberate, though the US is claiming lamely that its forces had “incorrect coordinates” that led to the fatal attacks. Sure.

These days the US doesn’t just rely on Garman GPS devices for its attacks. It sends in drones with high-res cameras and knows exactly what and who it is killing before it pulls the trigger. Meanwhile, we’ve been killing people in Yemen for years with planes sent from offshore aircraft carriers, and using missile-firing Predator drones.

In Latin America, American military “trainers” are fighting a war against leftist forces in Columbia, the CIA is supporting opposition groups seeking to oust the elected governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and other countries, and the US Justice Department is shipping weapons into drug-war-torn Mexico and helping to launder Mexican drug money back in the US. There are credible charges that the US has been supporting protests against Putin’s government in Russia (even as our own Homeland Security and “Justice” Departments coordinate violent police crackdowns on the Occupy protests against our own government’s craven support of the corrupt banks that have been wrecking the US and global economies).

And we Americans wonder: “Why do they hate us?” If real people around the world weren’t dying from all this criminal US behavior, and if real people here in America weren’t suffering because of all the trillions of dollars being wasted over the years on military

spending, spying, covert destabilization campaigns and overt war-making, it would all be laughable. But real people are dying and are suffering and there is nothing to laugh about.

Someday there will come a reckoning for the US, as there came a reckoning for Rome, for the British Empire, for the German Reich and for the USSR. A hollowed-out country like the this one, which is under-funding education, health care, infrastructure investment, research, and environmental protection, while its governing class steadily disenfranchises, disempowers, and impoverishes the public while systematically taking away their right to protest, is ultimately doomed.

It’s just a question of time, and of course a matter of how it happens. If we’re lucky, the dramatic awakening that began with the Occupy movement will spread and grow until an enraged public rises up en masse and evicts the entire corrupt gang from Washington, replacing them with genuine representatives of the people and a new commitment to true democratic governance.

If we’re not so lucky, this nation is likely to slide into global irrelevance – a backward relic of faded glory, a place where Chinese, Brazilian and European firms will invest to take advantage of our cheap, uneducated labor to produce goods to sell back in their own countries. Such an economic slide would of course not occur without violent conflicts and struggles over ever diminishing wealth and resources.

But if our government continues its present course of militarily meddling in other nations, the US will be almost universally loathed and, instead of being manipulated into fears of nonexistent threats to our “safety,” we Americans will finally have reason to genuinely fear the actions of other, more powerful, nations, which will find the temptation to compete in meddling in the affairs of what remains of the United States irresistible.

Reading the *New York Times*, an American might have been excused for wondering why Iraqis, and especially the people of Fallujah, would be so happy to see American occupying troops leaving the country and of nine

years of war against their country that they were actually celebrating.

The *Times* made it sound as though Fallujah deserved what happened to it. As the article published Dec. 15 notes dryly, American forces in 2004 twice attacked this largest city in Anbar Province to “pacify” it (there’s a political euphemism for you!) after insurgents there in March of 2004 captured four US “contractors” driving through the city, burned their bodies, and strung them up on a bridge over the Euphrates River.

First of all, let’s also dispense with the euphemistic term “contractors,” which is meant to bring to mind the image of a couple of overweight construction workers. In Iraq, and especially in lawless areas like Anbar at that time, “contractor” means “mercenary,” and we now know that mercenaries in Iraq (and in Afghanistan) were and are a lawless, bloodthirsty, group of former US military personnel and vicious thugs from various foreign fascist states like Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, apartheid South Africa and elsewhere, who have killed countless numbers of civilians in Iraq and elsewhere, operating outside of any government monitoring or legal constraints for “security firms” like Blackwater (now Xe) and DynCorp.

What actually happened in Fallujah though, was that because of Pentagon and US media-stoked domestic public outrage at the treatment of the four captured mercenaries, 20,000 US Marines were sent in to the city to level it and to slaughter its male inhabitants in an example of the kind of massive war crime tactic once popular with the Nazi Wehrmacht in World War II, where it was known as “collective punishment.” The Nazis used to burn down villages, particularly in Eastern Europe and the USSR, if even one shot was fired at them. But taking things much further in Iraq, US forces encircled Fallujah, a city of 300,000, in November, 2004, and ordered all non-combatants out of the area. Women and children were allowed to leave through checkpoints, but no males of “combat age” – which was illegally set, according to reports, at the age of 11, or by some accounts, at 14. In either case,

the whole thing was criminal. Under Geneva Conventions signed by the US, first of all all civilians are required to be granted free passage to escape from any field of battle or impending battle, and secondly, under those same Conventions, all children under the age of 18 are to be protected from war, not considered combatants. Even those who are found armed or captured while fighting are to be treated not as combatants, but as victims.

Instead of obeying the laws of war (which once approved by the Senate have the force of law under the US Constitution), US forces trapped all males in the city, including old men and young boys, and then went in with assault rifles, cannons, ground attack planes, helicopter and fixed-wing gunships, and with illegal weapons and weapons that cause mass deaths such as white phosphorus bombs, napalm, anti-personnel shells and depleted uranium shells. US forces basically killed everything that moved in numbers ranging upward of 6000 (In contrast the UN is expressing horror that the government in Syria has killed 5000 people in its crackdown on a democracy movement there). There were accounts of people being shot in the river as they tried to swim away from the city, of hospitals being raided and ambulances bombed, and there were even videos of seriously wounded and unarmed Iraqi fighters being coldly executed by Marines. What was done to Fallujah was as vile, evil and criminal a campaign of retribution and vengeance, exercised against enemy fighters and trapped civilians alike, as anything Hitler’s SS ever engaged in.

The *Times* article made no mention about any of this – an exercise in censorship and propaganda made all the more outrageous because the atrocity was well reported at the time it happened by the paper’s own excellent war reporter, Dexter Filkins. Knowing what really happened, and what the US military really did in Fallujah, would make much more understandable to Americans why the end of US occupation of Iraq has been greeted with a “festival” atmosphere in the still recovering city of Fallujah.

.....  
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 .....

.....  
*Dave Lindorff is a founding member of ThisCantBe Happening!, the new Project-Censored award-winning independent online alternative newspaper. He is a contributor to “Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion”, forthcoming from AK Press.*  
 .....

**CT**

# Persian Roulette

Ray McGovern & Elizabeth Murray on the flood of propaganda that is steering the United States into another war in the Middle East

.....  
If your advisers have persuaded you that hostilities with Iran would bring benefit to Israel, they are badly mistaken  
.....

President Obama needs to put an abrupt halt to the game of Persian Roulette about to spin out of control in the Persian Gulf. If we were still on active duty at the CIA, this is what we would tell him:

This informal memorandum addresses the escalating game of chicken playing out in the waters off Iran and the more general issue of what can be done to put the exaggerated threat from Iran in some kind of perspective.

In keeping with the informality of this memo and our ethos of speaking truth to power, we may at times be rather blunt. If we bring you up short, consider it a measure of the seriousness with which we view the unfolding of yet another tragic mistake.

The stakes are quite high, and as former intelligence analysts with no axes to grind, we want to make sure you understand how fragile and volatile the situation in the Gulf has become.

We know you are briefed regularly on the play by play, and we will not attempt to replicate that. Your repeated use of the bromide that “everything is on the table,”

however, gives us pause and makes us wonder whether you and your advisers fully recognize the implications, if hostilities with Iran spin out of control.

You have the power to stop the madness, and we give you some recommendations on how to lessen the likelihood of a war that would be to the advantage of no one but the arms merchants.

If your advisers have persuaded you that hostilities with Iran would bring benefit to Israel, they are badly mistaken. In our view, war with Iran is just as likely in the longer term to bring the destruction of Israel, as well as vast areas of Iran – not even to mention the disastrous consequences for the world economy, of which you must be aware.

Incendiary (but false) claims about how near Iran is to having a nuclear weapon are coming “fast and furious,” (and are as irresponsible as that ill-fated project of giving weapons to Mexican drug dealers).

In our view, the endless string of such claims now threaten to migrate from rhetoric to armed clashes to attempted “regime change,” as was the case nine





years ago on Iraq. You know, we hope, that influential – but myopic – forces abound who are willing to take great risk because they believe such events would redound to the benefit of Israel. We make reference, of course, to the reckless Likud government in Israel and its equally reckless single-issue supporters here at home.

### Inept advisers

Judging by recent performance, your foreign policy and military advisers, including the top generals now in place, appear unable to act as sensible counterweights to those who think that, by beginning hostilities with Iran, they will help Israel do away with a key regional rival.

You are not stuck with such advisers. You're the President; you deserve better. You need some people close to you who know a lot more about the outside world.

You may wish to think also about how the recent remarks of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Martin Dempsey, during an interview with the Washington Post's Greg Jaffe, reflect on the chairman's acumen in the strategic matters in which he has been immersed for decades.

In the interview with Jaffe, Dempsey referred to his 20-year involvement with Iraq (where he made his mark) and, according to Jaffe, Dempsey acknowledged that "he and his Army did not fully understand the nature of the conflict they were fighting."

Jaffe quotes a particularly telling lament by Dempsey: "People say, 'For God's sakes, you were a two-star general. How could you say you didn't understand?' ... I don't know how I can say it, but I lived it. And I mean it."

Suffice it to say that there are serious questions as to how much Gen. Dempsey understands about Iran and whether his meteoric rise to Chairman of the JCS is

due more to the crisp salute with which he greets any idea voiced by those above him.

Discussing last week the possibility of military action against Iran, Dempsey said, "The options we are developing are evolving to a point that they would be executable, if necessary." He added that his "biggest worry is that (Iranians) will miscalculate our resolve."

That's not our biggest worry. Rather it is that Dempsey and you will miscalculate Iran's resolve. We haven't a clue as to what, if anything, the Chairman is telling you on that key issue. Our distinct impression, however, is that you cannot look to him for the kind of stand-up advice you got from his predecessor, Adm. Mike Mullen.

The consummate military professional, Mullen pointed to the military and strategic realities – and the immense costs – associated with a war with Iran, which in turn buttressed those who successfully withstood pressure from President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney for war with Iran.

### Dempsey = no Mullen

During the Bush administration, Mullen argued strongly that there would be no way a "preventive war" against Iran would be worth the horrendous cost. He did all he could to scuttle the idea.

Mullen was among those senior officials who forced Bush and Cheney to publish the unclassified Key Judgments of the November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program – the NIE that judged "with high confidence that in the fall of 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program."

As Bush and Vice President Cheney have since acknowledged, that drove an iron rod through the wheels of the juggernaut then rolling off to war with Iran. And, as you know, that judgment still

.....  
**There are serious questions as to how much Gen. Dempsey understands about Iran**  
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**Never before had a senior U.S. official braced Israel so blatantly about the Liberty incident, which was covered up by the Johnson administration, the Congress, and Mullen's Navy itself**  
.....

stands despite Herculean efforts to fudge it.

In his memoir, *Decision Points*, Bush, complains bitterly that, rather than being relieved by the surprising news that Iran had stopped its nuclear weapons program in late 2003, he was angry that the news “tied my hands on the military side.”

In January 2008, Bush flew to Israel to commiserate with senior Israeli officials who were similarly bitter at the abrupt removal of a *casus belli*. Tellingly, in his book Bush added this lament:

“But after the NIE, how could I possible explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?”

The new estimate on Iran did not stop the Israelis from trying. And in mid-2008, they seemed to be contemplating one more try at provoking hostilities with Iran before Bush and Cheney left office.

This time, with Bush's (but not Cheney's) support, Mullen flew to Israel to tell Israeli leaders to disabuse themselves of the notion that U.S. military support would be knee-jerk automatic if they somehow provoked open hostilities with Iran.

According to the Israeli press, Mullen went so far as to warn the Israelis not to even think about another incident at sea like the deliberate Israeli attack on the USS Liberty on June 8, 1967, which left 34 American crew killed and more than 170 wounded.

Never before had a senior U.S. official braced Israel so blatantly about the Liberty incident, which was covered up by the Johnson administration, the Congress, and Mullen's Navy itself. The lesson the Israelis had taken away from the Liberty incident was that they could get away with murder, literally, and walk free because of political realities in the United States. Not this time, said Mullen. He

could not have raised a more neuralgic issue.

.....  
**Unintended consequences ...**

As long as he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Mike Mullen kept worrying, often publicly, over what he termed “the unintended consequences of any sort of military action against Iran.”

We assume that before he retired last fall he shared that concern with you, just as we tried to warn your predecessor of “the unintended consequences” that could flow from an attack on Iraq.

The Israelis, for their part, would not relent. In February of this year, Mullen returned with sweaty palms from a visit to Israel. On arrival there, he had warned publicly that an attack on Iran would be “a big, big, big problem for all of us.”

When Mullen got back to Washington, he lacked the confident tone he had after reading the Israelis the riot act in mid-2008. It became quickly clear that Mullen feared that, this time, Israel's leaders did not seem to take his warnings seriously.

Lest he leave a trace of ambiguity regarding his professional view, upon his return Mullen drove it home at a Pentagon press conference on Feb. 22, 2011: “For now, the diplomatic and the economic levers of international power are and ought to be the levers first pulled. Indeed, I would hope they are always and consistently pulled. No strike, however effective, will be, in and of itself, decisive.”

In 2008, right after Mullen was able, in late June, to get the Israelis to put aside, for the nonce, their pre-emptive plans vis-à-vis Iran, he moved to put a structure in place that could short-circuit military escalation. Specifically, he thought through ways to prevent unintended (or, for that matter, deliberately provoked) incidents in the crowded Persian Gulf that could lead to wider hostilities.

In a widely unnoticed remark, Adm. Mullen conceded to the press that Iran could shut down the Strait of Hormuz, but quickly added de rigueur assurance that the U.S. could open it up again (whereas the Admiral knows better than virtually anyone that this would be no easy task).

Mullen sent up an interesting trial balloon at a July 2, 2008, press conference, when he suggested that military-to-military dialogue could “add to a better understanding” between the U.S. and Iran. But nothing more was heard of this overture, probably because Cheney ordered him to drop it. We think it is high time to give this excellent idea new life. (See below under Recommendations.)

The dangers in and around the Strait of Hormuz were still on Mullen’s mind as he prepared to retire on Sept. 30, 2011. Ten days before, he told the Armed Force Press Service of his deep concern over the fact that the United States and Iran have had no formal communications since 1979:

“Even in the darkest days of the Cold War, we had links to the Soviet Union. ... We are not talking to Iran. So we don’t understand each other. If something happens, it’s virtually assured that we won’t get it right, that there will be miscalculations.”

Playing with fire: With the macho game of chicken currently under way between Iranian and U.S. naval forces in the area of the Strait of Hormuz, the potential for an incident has increased markedly.

An accident, or provocation, could spiral out of control quickly, with all sides – Iran, the U.S. and Israel making hurried decisions with, you guessed it, “unintended consequences.”

.....  
**... or Intended consequences?**

With your campaign for the presidency in full swing during the summer of 2008,

you may have missed a troubling disclosure in July by Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh.

He reported that Bush administration officials had held a meeting in the Vice President’s office in the wake of the January 2008 incident between Iranian patrol boats and U.S. warships in the Strait of Hormuz. The reported purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways to provoke war with Iran.

HERSH: There were a dozen ideas proffered about how to trigger a war. The one that interested me the most was why don’t we build in our shipyard four or five boats that look like Iranian PT boats. Put Navy seals on them with a lot of arms. And next time one of our boats goes to the Straits of Hormuz, start a shoot-up. Might cost some lives.

And it was rejected because you can’t have Americans killing Americans. That’s the kind of – that’s the level of stuff we’re talking about. Provocation.

Silly? Maybe. But potentially very lethal. Because one of the things they learned in the [January] incident was the American public, if you get the right incident, the American public will support bang-bang-kiss-kiss. You know, we’re into it.

Look, is it high school? Yeah. Are we playing high school with you know 5,000 nuclear warheads in our arsenal? Yeah we are. We’re playing, you know, who’s the first guy to run off the highway with us and Iran.

.....  
**... and now Iran’s responsibility for 9/11!**

On the chance you missed it, this time your government is getting “incriminating” information from Iranian, not Iraqi, “defectors.” Iranian “defectors” have persuaded Manhattan Federal Judge George Daniels to sign an order accusing Iran and Hezbollah – along with al-Qaeda – of

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**With the macho game of chicken currently under way between Iranian and U.S. naval forces in the area of the Strait of Hormuz, the potential for an incident has increased markedly**  
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**Netanyahu  
brags about  
how he deceived  
President Bill  
Clinton into  
believing he  
(Netanyahu)  
was helping  
implement the  
Oslo accords  
when he  
was actually  
destroying them**  
.....

responsibility for the 9/11 attacks.

On Dec. 15, in response to a lawsuit brought by family members of 9/11 victims, Daniels claimed that Iran provided material support to al-Qaeda and has assessed Iran \$100 billion in damages

Watching the blackening of Iranians on virtually all parts of the U.S. body politic, it is no surprise that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu believes he holds the high cards, enjoying the strong support of our Congress, our largely pro-Israel media, and our courts as well. He sees himself in the catbird seat – particularly during the lead-up to the U.S. presidential election.

We know that you have said you have to deal with Netanyahu every day. But for those of us who have not had the pleasure, never did his attitude toward Washington come through so clearly as in a video taped nine years ago and shown on Israeli TV.

In it Netanyahu brags about how he deceived President Bill Clinton into believing he (Netanyahu) was helping implement the Oslo accords when he was actually destroying them. The tape displays a contemptuous attitude toward – and wonderment at – a malleable America so easily influenced by Israel.

Netanyahu says it right out: “America is something that can be easily moved. Moved in the right direction. ... They won’t get in our way ... Eighty percent of the Americans support us. It’s absurd.”

Israeli columnist Gideon Levy has written that the video shows Netanyahu to be “a con artist ... who thinks that Washington is in his pocket and that he can pull the wool over its eyes,” adding that such behavior “does not change over the years.”

On Dec. 29, the strongly pro-Israel Washington Times ran an unsigned editorial, “Tehran’s moment of truth: The mullahs are playing with fire in Strait of Hormuz.” After a fulsome paragraph of

bragging about how the U.S. Navy capabilities dwarf those of Iran’s, the Washington Times editors inadvertently give the game away:

“A theater-wide response to the strait closure would involve air strikes on military and leadership targets throughout the country, and the crisis could be a useful pretext for international action against Iran’s nuclear program.”

Hopefully, pointing out Israel’s overarching objective will strike you as gratuitous. No doubt your advisers have told you that “regime change” (what we used to call overthrowing a government) is Israel’s ultimate goal. Just so you know.

.....  
**Recommendations**

We hope that, when we assume you wish to thwart Israel and any other party who might want to get the U.S. involved in hostilities with Iran, we are not assuming too much. With that as our premise, we recommend that you:

1. Make public, as soon as possible, a declassified version of the key judgments of the latest National Intelligence Estimate on Iran’s nuclear development program, with whatever updating is necessary. You know that the Herculean efforts of U.S. intelligence to find evidence of an active nuclear weapons program in Iran have found nothing.

Do not insult Americans with Rumsfeldian nostrums like: “The absence of evidence is NOT evidence of absence.” Rather, be up-front with the American people. Tell them the truth about the conclusions of our intelligence community.

Bush was helped to launch the aggressive war on Iraq by a deliberately dishonest National Intelligence Estimate on weapons of mass destruction there. Let yourself be fortified by an honest NIE on Iran, and stand up to the inevitable criti-

cism from Israelis and their influential surrogates.

2. Pick up on Adm. Mike Mullen's suggestion at his press conference on July 2, 2008, that military-to-military dialogue could "add to a better understanding" between the U.S. and Iran. If there were ever a time when our navies need to be able to communicate with each other, it is now.

It was a good idea in 2008; it is an even better idea now. Indeed, it seems likely that a kind of vestigial Cheneyism, as well as pressure from the Likud Lobby, account for the fact that the danger of a U.S.-Iranian confrontation in the crowded Persian Gulf has still not been addressed in direct talks.

Cheney and those of his mini-National Security Staff who actually looked forward to such confrontations are gone from the scene. If the ones who remain persist in thwarting time-tested structural ways of preventing accidents, miscalculation and covert false-flag attacks, please consider suggesting that they retire early.

Order the negotiation of the kind of bilateral "incidents-at-sea" agreement concluded with the Russians in May 1972, which, together with direct communications, played an essential role in heading off escalation neither side wanted, when surface or submarine ships go bump in the night.

3. Get yourself some advisers who know more about the real world than the ones you have now, and make sure they owe allegiance solely to the United States.

4. Issue a formal statement that your administration will not support an Israeli military attack on Iran. Make it clear that even though, after Dec. 31, the U.S. may not be technically responsible for defending Iraqi airspace, you have ordered U.S. Air Force units in the area to down any intruders.

5. Sit back and look toward a New Year with a reasonable prospect of less, not more, tension in the Persian Gulf.

Happy New Year.

**CT**

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**If there were  
 ever a time when  
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 with each other,  
 it is now**  
 .....

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***Ray McGovern** works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served a total of 30 years as an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then a CIA intelligence analyst.*  
 .....

.....  
***Elizabeth Murray** served as Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East in the National Intelligence Council before retiring after a 27-year career in the U.S. government, where she specialized in Middle Eastern political and media analysis. She is a member of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity*  
 .....

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# War advocates take some heavy hits

Sherwood Ross examines the flimsy case against Iran

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"He is calmly advocating a course of action will inevitably kill a significant number of people, including civilians"  
.....

Advocates of a hot war with Iran have just taken some heavy hits from a Harvard professor of international relations and two prominent journalists.

Harvard's Professor Stephen Walt has savaged an article in the forthcoming *Foreign Affairs* magazine (Jan.-Feb.) by Matthew Kroenig titled, *Time to Attack Iran: Why a Strike Is the Least Bad Option*. Kroenig, an assistant professor of government at Georgetown University, wrote:

"The truth is that a military strike intended to destroy Iran's nuclear program, if managed carefully, could spare the region and the world a very real threat and dramatically improve the long-term national security of the United States."

Calling this "a remarkably poor piece of advocacy," Harvard's Walt writes that Kroenig "makes the case for war by assuming everything will go south if the US does not attack and that everything will go swimmingly if it does. This is not fair-minded 'analysis'; it is simply a brief for war designed to reach a predetermined conclusion," Walt writes of the *Foreign Affairs* piece.

"He (Kroenig) is openly calling for preventive war against Iran, even though the United States has no authorization from the UN Security Council, it is not clear that Iran is actively developing nuclear weapons, and Iran has not attacked us or any of our allies - ever," Walt writes.

"He is therefore openly calling for his country to violate international law. He is calmly advocating a course of action will inevitably kill a significant number of people, including civilians ... and Kroenig is willing to have their deaths on his conscience on the basis of a series of unsupported assertions, almost all of them subject to serious doubt."

Writing in UK's *Guardian* newspaper December 7, journalist Seumas Milne points out that Iran is a peaceful nation that "has invaded no one in 200 years" while "the US and Israel have attacked 10 countries or territories between them in the past decade." What's more, Milne adds, "Britain exploited, occupied and overthrew governments in Iran for over a century. So who threatens who exactly?"

He goes on to write, "For months the evidence has been growing that a US-Israeli



stealth war against Iran has already begun, backed by Britain and France. Covert support for armed opposition groups has spread into a campaign of assassinations of Iranian scientists, cyber warfare, attacks on military and missile installations, and the killing of an Iranian general, among others.”

Milne also called it an “extraordinary admission” that British defense officials said if the US planned to attack Iran, as they believed it might, America would receive “UK military help,” including sea and air support. “The British military establishment fully expects to take part in an unprovoked US attack on Iran – just as it did against Iraq eight years ago,” he said.

(This admission shouldn’t be that astonishing as the US and UK are inextricably tied together militarily and in a number of other significant ways and appear to be bent on advancing the imperial goals of the old British Empire. A superficial difference today is that the Empire’s capital has moved from London to Washington. In reality, from their joint intelligence operations to their collaborating oil companies to their defense contractors, etc., US/UK operate as One. Maybe the long-time partners should rebrand themselves the United States of England?)

Meanwhile, American journalist Patrick J. Buchanan pointed out that Defense Sec-

retary Leon Panetta “dropped some jolting news” when he told CBS, “If we get intelligence they (Iranians) are proceeding with developing a nuclear weapons, then we will take whatever steps necessary to deal with it.”

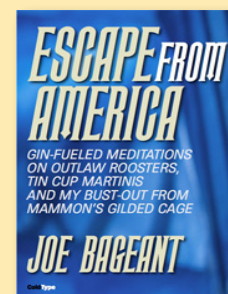
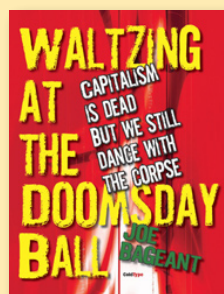
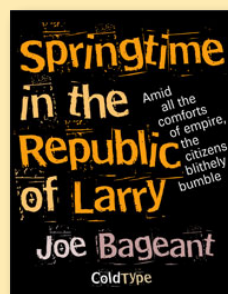
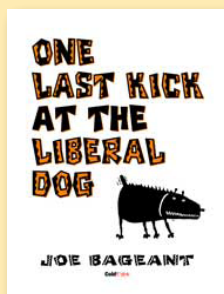
In his column of December 22, Buchanan charged, “Panetta is raising the specter of preemptive war,” adding, “This is no minor matter. For not only have Panetta and Barack Obama talked about ‘all options on the table’ regarding Iran – i.e., we do not rule out military strikes – so, too, have the GOP presidential candidates, save Rep. Ron Paul.”

Responding to Pentagon Press Secretary George Little’s statement, “We have no indication that the Iranians have made a decision to develop a nuclear weapons,” Buchanan wrote it “coincides with the consensus of all 16 US intelligence agencies, including the CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency, in December, 2007.”

Or, to put it another way, in the blunt words of *Guardian’s* Milne, “The case against Iran is ... spectacularly flimsy.” **CT**

*Sherwood Ross is a US-based public relations consultant for “good causes” who formerly reported for the Chicago Daily News and worked as a columnist for several wire services.*

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**the US and UK are inextricably tied together militarily and in a number of other significant ways and appear to be bent on advancing the imperial goals of the old British Empire**  
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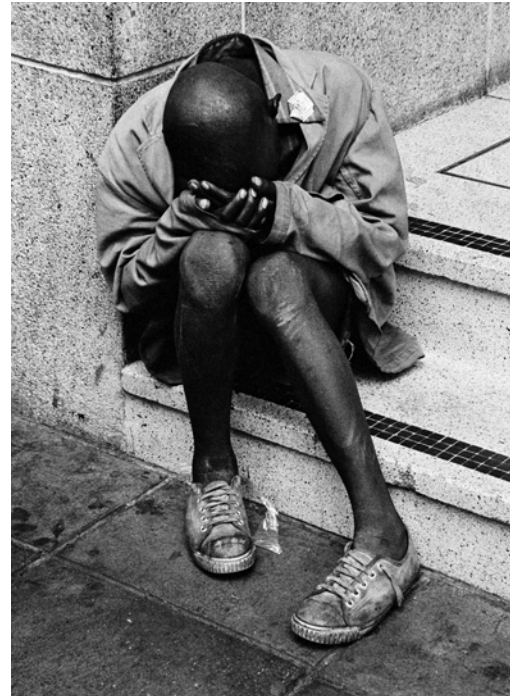
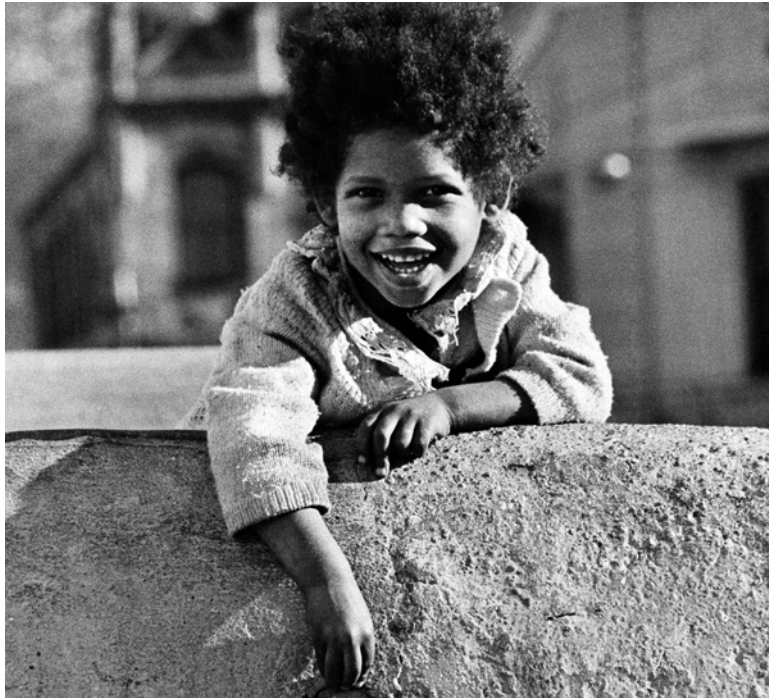


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# Journey to jail

Stan Winer went to South Africa to take photographs and ended up in exile



In 1973, during the darkest days of apartheid, South Africa was blanketed in censorship and brutal oppression, Stan Winer, a South African based in London, was commissioned by the International Defence and Aid Fund to photograph social and political conditions in the country.

Winer was eventually arrested by the security police after several months posing as a tourist while clandestinely recording images that would be unlike those seen in South African tourism brochures. According to the police, Winer was a “security risk” and was detained under the country’s anti-terrorism laws, which allowed indefinite detention without trial.

He spent the next three months in solitary confinement, where he was tortured in unsuccessful attempts to force him to confess to being part of a “terrorist conspiracy”, while being threatened with charges under the country’s General Law Amendment Act, which allowed the death penalty to be imposed on South Africans who had

campaigns abroad for international sanctions, should such individuals ever return to the country.

Following the intervention of human rights lawyers, Winer was eventually released from detention and placed under restrictions that prevented him from leaving the country for the next five years. His cameras and South African passport were confiscated and dozens of rolls of film destroyed. Winer fled to Botswana in 1977, where he was granted political asylum as a stateless person, making his way back to London the following year.

These are some of the images that the rulers of apartheid fascism regarded as a “threat to national security”. These images escaped the censors and the incinerators because they had been smuggled out the country shortly before his arrest.

Winer’s South African passport was restored in 1991 and he returned to SA the same year.

**CT**

.....  
*Stan Winer’s web site is [www.truth-hertz.net](http://www.truth-hertz.net)*





**Pity the children:** Some of the photographs of children in Johannesburg and Cape Town that Stan Winer smuggled out of South Africa before he was detained and tortured by the apartheid regime's security police in 1974.

# Israel's grand hypocrisy

Netanyahu slams 'anti-liberal' Arab Spring, writes **Jonathan Cook**

.....  
**One human rights group warned that all groups assisting the UN's 2009 report report by Judge Richard Goldstone into war crimes committed during Israel's attack on Gaza in winter 2008 would be vulnerable**  
.....

**A**s protests raged again across the Middle East, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, offered his assessment of the Arab Spring. It was, he said, an "Islamic, anti-western, anti-liberal, anti-Israeli, undemocratic wave", adding that Israel's Arab neighbours were "moving not forwards, but backwards".

It takes somechutzpah – or, at least, epic self-delusion – for Israel's prime minister to be lecturing the Arab world on liberalism and democracy at this moment.

In recent weeks, a spate of anti-democratic measures have won support from Netanyahu's rightwing government, justified by a new security doctrine: see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil of Israel. If the legislative proposals pass, the Israeli courts, Israel's human rights groups and media, and the international community will be transformed into the proverbial three monkeys.

Israel's vigilant human rights community has been the chief target of this assault. Yesterday Netanyahu's Likud faction and the Yisrael Beiteinu party of his far-right foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, proposed a new law that would snuff out much of the human rights community in Israel.

The bill effectively divides non-governmental organisations (NGOs) into two kinds: those defined by the right as pro-Israel and those seen as "political", or anti-Israel. The favoured ones, such as ambulance services

and universities, will continue to be lavishly funded from foreign sources, chiefly wealthy private Jewish donors from the United States and Europe.

The "political" ones – meaning those that criticise government policies, especially relating to the occupation – will be banned from receiving funds from foreign governments, their main source of income. Donations from private sources, whether Israeli or foreign, will be subject to a crippling 45 per cent tax.

The grounds for being defined as a "political" NGO are suitably vague: denying Israel's right to exist or its Jewish and democratic character; inciting racism; supporting violence against Israel; supporting politicians or soldiers being put on trial in international courts; or backing boycotts of the state.

One human rights group warned that all groups assisting the UN's 2009 report report by Judge Richard Goldstone into war crimes committed during Israel's attack on Gaza in winter 2008 would be vulnerable to such a law. Other organisations like Breaking the Silence, which publishes the testimonies of Israeli soldiers who have committed or witnessed war crimes, will be silenced themselves. And an Israeli Arab NGO said it feared that its work demanding equality for all Israeli citizens, including the fifth who are Palestinian, and an end to Jewish privilege would count as denying Israel's Jewish character.

At the same time Netanyahu wants the



Israeli media emasculated. Last week his government threw its weight behind a new defamation law that will leave few but millionaires in a position to criticise politicians and officials. Mr Netanyahu observed: "It may be called the Defamation Law, but I call it the 'publication of truth law.'" The media and human rights groups fear the worst.

This monkey must speak no evil.

Another bill, backed by the justice minister, Yaacov Neeman, is designed to skew the make-up of a panel selecting judges for Israel's supreme court. Several judicial posts are about to fall vacant, and the government hopes to stuff the court with appointees who share its ideological worldview and will not rescind its anti-democratic legislation, including its latest attack on the human rights community. Neeman's favoured candidate is a settler who has a history of ruling against human rights organisations.

Senior legislators from Mr Netanyahu's party are pushing another bill that would make it nigh impossible for human rights organisations to petition the supreme court against government actions.

The judicial monkey should see no evil.

At one level, these and a host of other measures – including increasing government intimidation of the Israeli media and academia, a crackdown on whistleblowers and the recently passed boycott law, which exposes critics of the settlements to expensive court actions for damages – are designed to strengthen the occupation by disarming its critics inside Israel.

But there is another, even more valued goal: making sure that in future the plentiful horror stories from the Palestinian territories – monitored by human rights organisations, reported by the media and heard in the courts – never reach the ears of the international community.

The third monkey is supposed to hear no evil.

The crackdown is justified in the Israeli right's view on the grounds that criticism of the occupation represents not domestic con-

cerns but unwelcome foreign interference in Israel's affairs. The promotion of human rights – whether in Israel, the occupied territories or the Arab world – is considered by Netanyahu and his allies as inherently un-Israeli and anti-Israeli.

The hypocrisy is hard to stomach. Israel has long claimed special dispensation to interfere in the affairs of both the EU and the United States. Jewish Agency staff proselytise among European and American Jews to persuade them to emigrate to Israel. Uniquely, Israel's security agencies are given free rein at airports around the world to harass and invade the privacy of non-Jews flying to Tel Aviv. And Israel's political proxies abroad – sophisticated lobby groups like AIPAC in the US – act as foreign agents while not registering as such.

Of course, Israel's qualms against foreign meddling are selective. No restrictions are planned for rightwing Jews from abroad, such as US casino magnate Irving Moskowitz, who have pumped enormous sums into propping up illegal Jewish settlements built on Palestinian land.

There is a faulty logic too to Israel's argument. As human rights activists point out, the areas where they do most of their work are located not in Israel but in the Palestinian territories, which Israel is occupying in violation of international law.

Privately, European embassies have been trying to drive home this point. The EU gives Israel preferential trading status, worth billions of dollars annually to the Israeli economy, on condition that it respects human rights in the occupied territories. Europe argues it is, therefore, entitled to fund the monitoring of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. More's the pity that Europe fails to act on the information it receives.

Given the right's strengthening hand, it can be expected to devise ever more creative ways to silence the human rights community and Israeli media and emasculate the courts as way to end the bad press.

Israelis are obsessed with their country's image abroad and what they regard as a "dele-

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**No restrictions are planned for rightwing Jews from abroad, such as US casino magnate Irving Moskowitz, who have pumped enormous sums into propping up illegal Jewish settlements built on Palestinian land.**  
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**Netanyahu's ultimate goal is to turn the clock back 40 years, to a "golden age" when foreign correspondents and western governments could refer, without blushing, to the occupation of the Palestinians as "benign"**  
.....

gitimisation" campaign that threatens not only the occupation's continuation but also Israel's long-term survival as an ethnic state. The leadership has been incensed by regular surveys of global opinion showing Israel ranked among the most unpopular countries in the world.

The Palestinians' recent decision to turn to the international community for recognition of statehood has only amplified such grievances.

Israel has no intention of altering its policies, or of pursuing peace. Rather, Netanyahu's government has been oscillating between a desperate desire to pass yet more anti-democratic legislation to stifle criticism and a modicum of restraint motivated by fear of the international backlash.

A cabinet debate last month on legislation against human rights groups focused barely at all on the proposal's merits. Instead the head of the National Security Council, Yaakov Amidror, was called before ministers to explain whether Israel stood to lose more from passing such bills or from allowing human rights groups to carry on monitoring the occupation.

Deluded as it may seem, Netanyahu's ultimate goal is to turn the clock back 40 years, to a "golden age" when foreign correspondents

and western governments could refer, without blushing, to the occupation of the Palestinians as "benign".

Donald Neff, Jerusalem correspondent for *Time* magazine in the 1970s, admitted years later that his and his colleagues' performance was so feeble at the time in large part because there was little critical information available on the occupation. When he witnessed first-hand what was taking place, his editors in the US refused to believe him and he was eventually moved on.

Now, however, the genie is out the bottle. The international community understands full well – thanks to human rights activists – both that the occupation is brutal and that Israel has been peace-making in bad faith.

If Israel continues on its current course, another myth long accepted by western countries – that Israel is "the only democracy in the Middle East" – may finally be shattered.

**CT**

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

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# Controlling the internet by stealth

**John W. Whitehead** assesses proposed legislation that will result in the loss of even more individual freedom in North America

*“Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busy bodies. The robber baron’s cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.” – C.S. Lewis*

Americans have seen their freedoms decline on almost every front over the past decade. We have been spied on by surveillance cameras, eavesdropped on by government agents, had our belongings searched, our phones tapped, our mail opened, our email monitored, our opinions questioned, our purchases scrutinized (under the USA Patriot Act, banks are required to analyze your transactions for any patterns that raise suspicion and to see if you are connected to any objectionable people), and our activities watched. We’ve also been subjected to invasive patdowns and whole-body scans of our persons and seizures of our electronic devices in the nation’s airports. We can’t even purchase certain cold medicines at the pharmacy anymore without it being reported to the government and our names being placed on a watch list.

One of the few things that has kept us teetering on the edge of a full slide into tyranny

is the internet, the primary source of news and information for many people and the only place left where citizens still have the opportunity to freely speak their minds and exercise their First Amendment rights. It has also become a vital resource for activists and protesters in their efforts to raise awareness about injustice, record evidence of government abuse and organize demonstrations. Little wonder, then, that federal and state governments continue to try to gain control of the world wide web. After all, he who controls the internet controls the world.

In recent years, we have witnessed numerous attempts by the government, aided by its corporate allies, to gain control of the internet for purposes of regulation, surveillance and censorship. In fact, back in 2005, John Ashcroft, George Bush’s Attorney General, urged the FCC to require that internet communications be easier to wiretap. Then there was the internet “kill switch” legislation introduced in 2010 by Sens. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) to give the White House the power to kill the internet during a “national cyber emergency” without any review by the courts. That same year the *New York Times* reported that the Obama administration was preparing to submit legislation to Congress that would make it easier for the government to wiretap the internet. As Charlie Savage noted, “Essentially, officials want Congress to require

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all services that enable communications – including encrypted e-mail transmitters like BlackBerry, social networking Web sites like Facebook and software that allows direct ‘peer to peer’ messaging like Skype – to be technically capable of complying if served with a wiretap order.”

The National Security Agency (NSA) has also been designing an artificial intelligence system that is designed to anticipate your every move based on your internet activity. In a nutshell, the NSA will feed vast amounts of the information it collects to a computer system known as Aquaint (the acronym stands for Advanced QUestion Answering for INTelligence), which the computer can then use to detect patterns and predict behavior. No information is sacred or spared. Everything from cell phone recordings and logs, to emails, to text messages, to personal information posted on social networking sites, to credit card statements, to library circulation records, to credit card histories, etc., is collected by the NSA. One NSA researcher actually quit the program, “citing concerns over the dangers in placing such a powerful weapon in the hands of a top-secret agency with little accountability.”

By the time you add in Facebook’s facial recognition technology, corporate opposition to Net Neutrality legislation, and data retention mandates by Congress, any semblance of hope for anonymity on the internet is lost. Similarly, President Obama’s plan to create an online ID system which would aid in verifying the identity of internet users communicating and initiating transactions on the web was yet another thinly disguised attempt to monitor, regulate and control the internet. It would also give the government unprecedented access to Americans’ internet activities – something it has sought for years through a multitude of channels. Then in late July 2011, the House Judiciary Committee passed the cleverly titled “Protecting Children from Internet Pornographers Act of 2011,” which lays the groundwork for all internet traffic to be easily monitored by gov-

ernment officials.

Now we have the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), currently making its way through the House of Representatives, and its sister legislation in the Senate, the Protect IP Act (PIPA), which are supposedly intended to combat copyright violations on the Internet. Unfortunately, these bills are written so broadly so as to not only eliminate Internet piracy but replace the innovative and democratic aspects of the Internet with a tangled bureaucratic mess regulated by the government and corporations.

Naturally, the bill’s major backers – who have put hundreds of thousands of dollars into the pockets of members of Congress – are those who stand to benefit most from the implementation of currently existing copyright laws. These include such large corporate entities as the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the Screen Actors Guild, the US Chamber of Commerce and major drug companies such as Pfizer (the latter are supporting the bill because it will target advertisements for knockoff medications).

While holding companies accountable for their role in copyright infringement is important, this legislation threatens to turn the whole Internet on its head, disrupting innovation in business and technology and muting democratic dialogue, by allowing copyright holders to unilaterally impose sanctions on companies accused of copyright infringement without due process. Based solely on an accusation (not a conviction, mind you) of a copyright violation, the US Attorney General, and sometimes the copyright holding companies themselves, will be able to block access to and business transactions with websites accused of such violations. Financial institutions will be forced to stop transferring legal funds to accused websites, search engines will be forced to block accused websites, and advertisers will be forced to stop placing ads on accused websites.

Moreover, the bill is written so broadly as



to override the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which allows social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to operate freely. Unfortunately, under SOPA, if a user on YouTube or Facebook were to mistakenly or unintentionally upload copyrighted material to the sites, those websites could also be shut down. The legislation could also override an existing Internet security protocol, DNSSEC, which protects Internet users from hackers that attempt to redirect web traffic to imposter websites in order to steal their personal information.

Google, Facebook, Yahoo, AOL, Twitter, and eBay have all expressed concerns with the legislation, fearing the implications of having to micromanage user-submitted content in order to avoid liability for copyright infringement. There is also congressional opposition to the bill, with a wide variety of politicians, including Nancy Pelosi, Darrell Issa, Ron Paul, and Michele Bachmann, having voiced objections to it. Civil liberties and

human rights groups, including the ACLU and Reporters Without Borders, have come out against the bill as well.

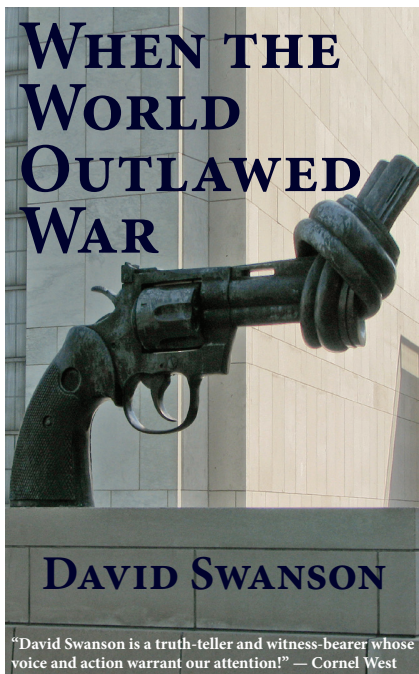
The last bastion of democracy is the internet, and the government is well aware of this. The Internet has proven critical for the flow of information, the evolution of business, and the democratization of political discussion. Passing the Stop Online Piracy Act would undo all of the great things which have been achieved via the power of the Internet.

Even if this legislation is stalled the government will find others to achieve its ultimate goal: total control – of the nation, of the internet, and ultimately of you and me. **CT**

*John W. Whitehead is a constitutional attorney and founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His new book “The Freedom Wars” (TRI Press) is available online at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). He can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org)*

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## Imagine if War Were Illegal — It Is!



In January 1929 the U.S. Senate ratified by a vote of 85 to 1 a treaty that is still on the books, still upheld by most of the world, still listed on the U.S. State Department’s website — a treaty that under Article VI of the U.S. Constitution is the “supreme law of the land.”

This treaty, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, bans all war. Bad wars and “good wars,” aggressive wars and “humanitarian wars” -- they are all illegal, having been legally abolished like duelling, blood feuds, and slavery before them.

The wisdom of the War Outlawry movement of the 1920s is revived in a new book by David Swanson. The full plan to outlaw war has never been followed through on. We have a duty to carry the campaign forward.

*“Swanson has done it again. This is a masterful account of how Americans and people around the world worked to abolish war as a legitimate act of state policy and won. Swanson’s account of the successful work of those who came before us to insist that war be outlawed compels us today to rethink the cost and morality of cynical or weary inaction in the face of our repeated resort to military threats and warfare to achieve policy goals.” — Jeff Clements, Author of Corporations Are Not People.*

[davidswanson.org/outlawry](http://davidswanson.org/outlawry)



# Understanding priorities

Fred Reed brings us a few lessons from his local bar

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So far as has  
been recorded,  
no one has died of  
dog poisoning  
.....

It was getting late in Ajijic when Vi and I headed for the Camaleon. The narrow streets were empty and somber. Gringos do not go out as much as they once did now that the narco wars have reached the town.

Light and music poured from the door. For some reason I thought of what the country must have been like in 1900, a wilder and cruder time with dirt streets and few people. Not much law, less schooling, raw tequila and suchlike bust-head in adobe cantinas, horses, guns, and rattlesnakes. Not a great world, but I would love to have seen it.

We took our usual table next to the fireplace. It is seldom lit. When it gets really hellishly cold here, you might need a light sweater. We ordered drinks and I wondered at the strangeness of life. (I know, I'm the only one who has ever done that.) I mean, what am I doing with an exotic Mexican woman in a town in Jalisco? (The exotic part is absurd, but I like saying it.) I communicated this to Vi. She responded that I wasn't exactly what she had expected when she was fifteen either.

Which will interest nobody. But it supports my view that living wisely is a bad idea. I've seldom done anything sensible that wasn't boring. Maybe my only contribution to the sum of human knowledge is that if you get sick of being a news weasel in Washington, Gualalajara isn't Washington.

By a long shot.

Ajijic is pretty much Mexico as conceived by sappy drones at Disney and gelded by expats who don't really want to live here but don't have the money for Lauderdale. Still, traces of Mexico remain among the boutiques. This is especially true at night when the bleakness of blank walls and cobblestones – actually *empedrado* – hold the modern world at a distance and hint at Mexico as it was. And, in many places, still is.

Mexico still has bars that are bars, joints where if the owner's dog, or a customer's, or the dog belonging to the bar down the street wants to come in to see what is happening, no one cares. So far as has been recorded, no one has died of dog poisoning.

.....  
**Urinals with character**

The Camaleon is such. The jukebox bellows and rumbles. The place does not look to have been designed at corporate meetings and when you order you don't get a very nice waiter who says, "Hi! I'm Bruce and I'm going to be your waitperson and I hope you have a *wonderful* dining experience." When you take a leak you do not feel as if you are profaning a surgical suite. The urinals have character.

In the United States real bars still exist, corner joints in blue-collar Chicago, the

Last Chance Saloon at the top of the Florida Keys, maybe the Sunset Grill in Washington, a million others. Yet the trend is toward the unpleasantly clean, obsessively controlled, captiously regulated, and over-policed with cops lurking outside with Alkasensors. However spelled. From a Commie under every bush, America has moved to a Mommy behind every bush. Can I have my Commies back?

An air of predatory virtue diffuses across the US, of passive-aggressive goodness by do-gooders taking out their unhappy lives on others. I would rather be left the hell alone. This isn't what the country was. It is what the country is.

Mexico used to be stranger than it is now. I think I was nineteen when I first dropped down into Saltillo from Laredo. In those days bars were for men only, except, in Saltillo, for the Arizpe Bar in a hotel. I found myself one night in a murky working-class mescal chute where your mother definitely would not want you to go. I was probably the first Caucasian the place had seen. A fellow came in with a wet-cell battery and a step-up transformer slung over his shoulder on a strap, with two cables leading from it to silvery hand-grips.

*Los toques.* The idea, if it rose to that level, was that to demonstrate your toughness, you held one contact in each hand while the proprietor of the things gradually turned up the voltage. Your muscles would begin to spasm and at a certain point you would not be able to release the toques. Or so I was told. I didn't make the experiment. The wisdom of applying a voltage across my chest did not leap to what mind I had at that age.

#### Therapists and bars

There is in segments of the American population a sniffish sense that bars are vicious places, ridden by Demon Rum and productive of drunkenness and maybe even billiards. In the parlance of those limited souls afflicted by these notions, one doesn't drink,

but "uses alcohol." One should therefore seek help from a therapist. I think therapists need to go to bars.

In fact bars are places of philosophy, of conviviality and conversation. Yes, any town has its drunks, chain smokers, and people dependent on Prozac. They are few, except for the Prozac gobblers. In any event, I prefer the occasionally sozzled to the Depakote zombies, the Xanax-disabled, and the Valium-dependent.

Mexico still has bars that, by custom though not law, are for men only. This works no hardship on women since bars integrated by sex are everywhere, and in any event the male-only establishments are not such as to be attractive to women. It apparently infuriates a subset of the American women here who, having a sort of Rosa Parks complex, go barging into traditionally male cantinas to integrate them. This creates considerable ill-will.

Which is curious. If women started an all-female bar, men wouldn't care at all.

A horse gallops past outside. I love it. Mexico is nothing if not motley. Teenagers rush around with smart phones and build websites and engage in the cyber-larceny of music. And yet horses – real ones, with feet, ears, tails, all the credentials – clop about. It isn't really primitivism. If you are going to raise cattle and goats in the rocky hills hereabouts, a horse is the only practical vehicle. I like horses. They eat grass and mind their own business. I can think of countries that might try the approach.

So much for searching insights. Actually there are probably only a dozen or so insights to be had, and everybody has already had them. We paid and left. The streets were again empty and silent. A cat saw us and ducked around a corner.

**CT**

*Fred Reed has worked on staff for Army Times, The Washingtonian, Soldier of Fortune, Federal Computer Week, and The Washington Times. His web site is [www.fredoneverything.net](http://www.fredoneverything.net)*

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**A fellow came in with a wet-cell battery and a step-up transformer slung over his shoulder on a strap, with two cables leading from it to silvery hand-grips**  
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# Unmasking the Press

Corporate newspapers are the elite's enforcers, misrepresenting the sources of oppression, writes **George Monbiot**

.....  
**Crime and anti-social behaviour are represented as the predations of the poor upon each other or upon the middle and upper classes**  
.....

**H**ave we ever been so badly served by the press? We face multiple crises – economic, environmental, democratic – but most newspapers represent them neither clearly nor fairly. The industry which should reveal and expose instead tries to contain and baffle, to foil questions and shut down dissent.

The men who own the corporate press are fighting a class war, seeking, even now, to defend the 1% to which they belong against its challengers. But, because they control much of the conversation, we seldom see it in these terms. Our press re-frames the major issues so effectively that it often recruits its readers to mobilise against their own interests.

Crime and anti-social behaviour are represented as the predations of the poor upon each other or upon the middle and upper classes. “Blonde millionaire’s wife raped in luxury home by asylum-seeking benefits cheat” is the transcendental form of a thousand tabloid headlines, alongside “Pippa Middleton’s bottom gets £1m makeover from top designer.” Though benefit fraud deprives the Exchequer of £1.1bn a year(1) while tax avoidance and evasion deprive it of between £40bn and £120bn(2,3), the tabloids relentlessly pursue the petty crooks, while leaving the capos alone.

Last month the rightwing papers applauded government plans to cut benefits

for people in social housing who have more rooms than they need. The “growing scandal of under-occupancy”, the *Mail* observed, contributes to the housing crisis, depriving larger families of the homes they need(4). The *Express* told us that “it is only right that decisions such as this must be taken.”(5) But what about the private sector, where there’s a much higher rate of under-occupation, especially among the wealthy?(6) When I suggested that these underused homes should be taxed, the corporate press went beserk(7). Only the poorest should carry the cost of resolving our housing crisis.

Not a day passes in which the rightwing papers fail to call for the stiffer regulation of protesters, problem families, petty criminals or anti-social teenagers. And every day they also call for the laxer regulation of business: cutting the “red tape” which prevents companies and banks from using the planet as their dustbin, killing workers or tanking the economy.

The newspapers’ own criminal behaviour, more of which is being exposed before the Leveson inquiry as I write(8), looks to me like the almost inevitable result of a culture which appears to believe that the law, like taxes and regulation, is for little people.

While portraying the underclass as a threat to “our” way of life, the corporate

papers ask us to celebrate the lives of the economic elite. The i devoted most of a page to a puff piece flogging the charming jumpers being sold by a Santa Sebag-Montefiore (nee Palmer-Tomkinson) from her “white stucco Kensington House”(9). She works – if that’s the right word for it – with someone she met at Klosters, where she and her family “ski with the Prince of Wales and Princes William and Harry.” So far they have managed to sell 40 of these jumpers, which somehow justifies an enormous photo and 1,400 breathless words.

I mention this sycophantic drivelt not because it is exceptional but because it is typical.

A friend who used to work as a freelance photographer for the *Telegraph* stopped when he discovered that most of those he was being sent to photograph were the well-heeled friends and relatives of people on the paper. Journalism is embedded in the world it should be challenging and confronting.

These papers recognise the existence of an oppressive elite, but they frame it purely in political terms. The political elite becomes oppressive when it tries to curb the powers and freedoms of the economic elite. Take this revealing conjunction in a recent *Daily Mail*’s leading article: “David Cameron yesterday finally said no to the European elite – vetoing plans for a treaty that included an EU-wide tax on financial transactions”(10). In other words, Cameron said yes to the British elite. But it cannot be explained in those terms without exposing where power really lies, which is the antithesis of what the rightwing papers seek to achieve.

As the theologian Walter Wink shows, challenging a dominant system requires a three-part process: naming the powers, unmasking the powers, engaging the powers(11). Their white noise of distraction and obfuscation is the means by which the newspapers prevent this process from beginning. They mislead us about the sources of our oppression, misrepresent our democratic choices, demonise those who try to

challenge the 1%.

Compare the *Daily Mail*’s treatment of the Occupy London protesters, confronting the banks, to its coverage of the camp set up by people of the charming village of Meriden, confronting some gypsies. “Desecration, defecation and class A drugs” was the headline on the *Mail*’s feature article about Occupy London(12). Published on the day on which the City of London began its attempts to evict them, it deployed every conceivable means of vilifying the protesters and justifying their expulsion. The Meriden story, on the other hand, was headlined “Adding insult to injury: now villagers who have protested against an illegal travellers’ camp for 586 days are told: YOU are facing eviction.”(13) The story emphasised the villagers’ calm fortitude and the justice of their cause. Presumably they don’t defecate either.

Press barons have been waging this class war for almost a century, and it has hobbled progressive politics throughout that time. But the closed circle of embedded journalism is now so tight that it has almost created an alternative reality.

Just before the end of last year, for example, the *Spectator* ran a cover story that could not have been crazier had it been headlined “Yes, Father Christmas does exist, but he’s been kidnapped by lizards.” A serial promoter of mumbo-jumbo called Nils-Axel Morner, who claims he has paranormal dowsing abilities and that an iron age cemetery in Sweden is in fact the Hong Kong of the ancient Greeks(14,15), was given 1,800 words to show that sea levels are not rising(16). Citing “evidence” that was anecdotal, irrelevant or simply wrong, explaining that it was all a massive conspiracy, Morner ignored or dismissed a vast wealth of solid data from satellites and tide gauges.

The *Spectator* kindly gave me space to write a response(17), but it strikes me that a story like this could not have been published five years ago. It first required a long process of normalisation, in which evident

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**Press barons have been waging this class war for almost a century, and it has hobbled progressive politics throughout that time**

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It's not just Murdoch and his network of sleazy crooks: our political system has been corrupted by the entire corporate media

falsehoods are repeated until they are widely believed to be true.

The climate talks in Durban were slotted into the same narrative by the papers, in which climate scientists and the BBC conspire to shut down the economy and send us back to the stone age. (And they have the blazing cheek to call us scaremongers).

It's not just Murdoch and his network of sleazy crooks: our political system has been corrupted by the entire corporate media. Defending ourselves from the economic elite means naming and unmasking the power of the press.

CT

George Monbiot's latest book is "Bring On The Apocalypse". This piece first appeared in London's Guardian newspaper.

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# Some thoughts that Occupy my mind

**William Blum** reflects on the Occupy movement from the perspective of a participant in the sixties rebellion against the war in Vietnam

**W**hen the Vietnam War became history, and the protest signs and the bullhorns were put away, so too was the serious side of most protestors' alienation and hostility toward the government. They returned, with minimal resistance, to the restless pursuit of success, and the belief that the choice facing the world was either "capitalist democracy" or "communist dictatorship". The war had been an aberration, was the implicit verdict, a blemish on an otherwise humane American record. The fear felt by the powers-that-be that society's fabric was unraveling and that the Republic was hanging by a thread turned out to be little more than media hype; it had been great copy.

I mention this to explain why I've been reluctant to jump with both feet on the Occupy bandwagon. I first thought that if nothing else the approaching winter would do them in; if not, it would be the demands of their lives – they have to make some money at some point, attend classes somewhere, lovers and friends and family they have to cater to somewhere; lately I've been thinking it's the police that will do them in, writing finis to their marvelous movement adventure – if you hold the system up to a mirror the system can go crazy.

But now I don't know. Those young people, and the old ones as well, keep surprising

me, with their dedication and energy, their camaraderie and courage, their optimism and innovation, their non-violence and their keen awareness of the danger of being co-opted their focusing on the economic institutions more than on the politicians or political parties. There is also their splendid signs and slogans, walking from New York to Washington, and not falling apart following the despicable police destruction of the Occupy Wall Street encampment. They've given a million young people other ideas about how to spend the rest of their lives, and commandeered a remarkable amount of media space. The *Washington Post* on several occasions has devoted full page or near-full page sympathetic coverage. Occupy is being taken increasingly seriously by virtually all media.

Yet, the 1960s and 70s were also a marvelous movement adventure – for me as much as for anyone – but nothing actually changed in US foreign policy as a result of our endless protests, many of which were also innovative. American imperialism has continued to add to its brutal record right up to this very moment. We can't even claim Vietnam as a victory. Most people believe that the US lost the war. But by destroying Vietnam to its core, by poisoning the earth, the water, the air, and the gene pool for generations, Washington in fact achieved its primary purpose: preventing the rise of

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**The 1960s and 70s were also a marvelous movement adventure, but nothing actually changed in US foreign policy as a result of our endless protests**  
 .....

**Aziz stated to Ted Koppel on ABC: “The fact is that we don’t have weapons of mass destruction. We don’t have chemical, biological, or nuclear weaponry”**

what might have been a good development option for Asia, an alternative to the capitalist model.

It has greatly helped Occupy’s growth and survival that they have seldom mentioned foreign policy. That’s much more sensitive ground than corporate abuse. Foreign policy gets into flag-waving, “our brave boys” risking their lives, American exceptionalism, nationalism, patriotism, loyalty, treason, terrorism, “anti-American”, “conspiracy theorist” ... all those emotional icons that mainstream America uses to separate a Good American from one who *ain’t really one of us*.

Foreign policy cannot be ignored permanently of course, if for no other reason than that the nation’s wealth that’s wasted on war could be used to pay for anything Occupy calls for ... or anything anyone calls for.

The education which Occupy has caused to be thrust upon the citizenry – about corporate abuse and criminality, political corruption, inequality, poverty, etc., virtually all unprosecuted – would be highly significant if America were a democracy. But as it is, more and more people can learn more and more about these matters, and get more and more angry, but have nowhere to turn to, to effectuate meaningful change. Money must be removed from the political process. Completely. It is my favorite Latin expression: *sine qua non* – “without which, nothing”.

**USrael and Iran**

There’s no letup, is there? The preparation of the American mind, the world mind, for the next gala performance of D&D – Death and Destruction. The Bunker Buster bombs are now 30,000 pounds each one, six times as heavy as the previous delightful model..

But the Masters of War still want to be loved; they need for you to believe them when they say they have no choice, that Iran is the latest threat to life as we know it,

no time to waste.

The preparation of minds was just as fervent before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. And when it turned out that Iraq did not have any kind of arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ... well, our power elite found other justifications for the invasion, and didn’t look back. Some berated Iraq: “Why didn’t they tell us that? Did they want us to bomb them?”

In actuality, before the US invasion high Iraqi officials had stated clearly on repeated occasions that they had no such weapons. In August 2002, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz told American newscaster Dan Rather on CBS: “We do not possess any nuclear or biological or chemical weapons.”

In December, Aziz stated to Ted Koppel on ABC: “The fact is that we don’t have weapons of mass destruction. We don’t have chemical, biological, or nuclear weaponry.”

Hussein himself told Rather in February 2003: “These missiles have been destroyed. There are no missiles that are contrary to the prescription of the United Nations [as to range] in Iraq. They are no longer there.”

Moreover, Gen. Hussein Kamel, former head of Iraq’s secret weapons program, and a son-in-law of Saddam Hussein, told the UN in 1995 that Iraq had destroyed its banned missiles and chemical and biological weapons soon after the Persian Gulf War of 1991.

There are yet other examples of Iraqi officials telling the world that the WMD were non-existent.

And if there were still any uncertainty remaining, last year Hans Blix, former chief United Nations weapons inspector, who led a doomed hunt for WMD in Iraq, told a British inquiry into the 2003 invasion that those who were “100 percent certain there were weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq turned out to have “less than zero percent knowledge” of where the purported hidden caches might be. He testified that he had warned British Prime Minister Tony

Blair in a February 2003 meeting – as well as US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in separate talks – that Hussein might have no weapons of mass destruction.

Those of who you don't already have serious doubts about the American mainstream media's knowledge and understanding of US foreign policy, should consider this: Despite the two revelations on Dan Rather's CBS programs, and the other revelations noted above, in January 2008 we find CBS reporter Scott Pelley interviewing FBI agent George Piro, who had interviewed Saddam Hussein before he was executed:

**PELLEY:** And what did he tell you about how his weapons of mass destruction had been destroyed?

**PIRO:** He told me that most of the WMD had been destroyed by the UN inspectors in the '90s, and those that hadn't been destroyed by the inspectors were unilaterally destroyed by Iraq.

**PELLEY:** He had ordered them destroyed?

**PIRO:** Yes.

**PELLEY:** So why keep the secret? Why put your nation at risk? Why put your own life at risk to maintain this charade?

The United States and Israel are preparing to attack Iran because of their alleged development of nuclear weapons, which Iran has denied on many occasions. Of the Iraqis who warned the United States that it was mistaken about the WMD – Saddam Hussein was executed, Tariq Aziz is awaiting execution. Which Iranian officials is US-rael going to hang after their country is laid to waste?

Would it have mattered if the Bush administration had fully believed Iraq when it said it had no WMD? Probably not. There is ample evidence that Bush knew this to be the case, or at a minimum should have seriously suspected it; the same applies to Tony Blair. Saddam Hussein did not sufficiently appreciate just how psychopathic his two adversaries were. Bush was determined to

vanquish Iraq, for the sake of Israel, for control of oil, and for expanding the empire with new bases, though in the end most of this didn't work out as the empire expected; for some odd reason, it seems that the Iraqi people resented being bombed, invaded, occupied, demolished, and tortured.

But if Iran is in fact building nuclear weapons, we have to ask: Is there some international law that says that the US, the UK, Russia, China, Israel, France, Pakistan, and India are entitled to nuclear weapons, but Iran is not? If the United States had known that the Japanese had deliverable atomic bombs, would Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been destroyed? Israeli military historian, Martin van Creveld, has written: "The world has witnessed how the United States attacked Iraq for, as it turned out, no reason at all. Had the Iranians not tried to build nuclear weapons, they would be crazy."

It can not be repeated too often: The secret to understanding US foreign policy is that there is no secret. Principally, one must come to the realization that the United States strives to dominate the world. Once one understands that, much of the apparent confusion, contradiction, and ambiguity surrounding Washington's policies fades away. Examine a map: Iran sits directly between two of the United States' great obsessions – Iraq and Afghanistan ... directly between two of the world's greatest oil regions – the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea areas ... it's part of the encirclement of the two leading potential threats to American world domination – Russia and China ... Tehran will never be a client state or obedient poodle to Washington. How could any good, self-respecting Washington imperialist resist such a target? Bombs Away!

**American exceptionalism – A survey**

The leaders of imperial powers have traditionally told themselves and their citizens that their country was exceptional and that

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.....  
**Try naming a single American daily newspaper or TV network that was unequivocally against the US attacks on Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Panama, Grenada, and Vietnam. Or even against any two of them. How about one?**  
.....

their subjugation of a particular foreign land should be seen as a “civilizing mission”, a “liberation”, “God’s will”, and of course bringing “freedom and democracy” to the benighted and downtrodden. It is difficult to kill large numbers of people without a claim to virtue. I wonder if this sense of exceptionalism has been embedded anywhere more deeply than in the United States, where it is drilled into every cell and ganglion of American consciousness from kindergarten on. If we measure the degree of indoctrination (I’ll resist the temptation to use the word “brainwashing”) of a population as the gap between what the people believe their government has done in the world and what the actual (very sordid) facts are, the American people are clearly the most indoctrinated people on the planet. The role of the American media is of course indispensable to this process – Try naming a single American daily newspaper or TV network that was unequivocally against the US attacks on Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Panama, Grenada, and Vietnam. Or even against any two of them. How about one? Which of the mainstream media expressed real skepticism of The War on Terror in its early years?

Overloaded with a sense of America’s moral superiority, each year the State Department judges the world, issuing reports evaluating the behavior of all other nations, often accompanied by sanctions of one kind or another. There are different reports rating how each lesser nation has performed in the previous year in the areas of religious freedom, human rights, the war on drugs, trafficking in persons, and counterterrorism, as well as maintaining a list of international “terrorist” groups. The criteria used in these reports are mainly political, wherever applicable; Cuba, for example, is always listed as a supporter of terrorism whereas anti-Castro exile groups in Florida, which have committed literally hundreds of terrorist acts, are not listed as

terrorist groups.

- “The causes of the malady are not entirely clear but its recurrence is one of the uniformities of history: power tends to confuse itself with virtue and a great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God’s favor, conferring upon it a special responsibility for other nations – to make them richer and happier and wiser, to remake them, that is, in its own shining image.” – Former US Senator William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (1966)

- “We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. ... God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls.” – Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* (1850)

- “God appointed America to save the world in any way that suits America. God appointed Israel to be the nexus of America’s Middle Eastern policy and anyone who wants to mess with that idea is a) anti-Semitic, b) anti-American, c) with the enemy, and d) a terrorist.” – John le Carré, *London Times*, January 15, 2003

- “Neoconservatism ... traded upon the historic American myths of innocence, exceptionalism, triumphalism and Manifest Destiny. It offered a vision of what the United States should do with its unrivaled global power. In its most rhetorically-seductive messianic versions, it conflated the expansion of American power with the dream of universal democracy. In all of this, it proclaimed that the maximal use of American power was good for both America and the world.” – Columbia University Professor Gary Dorrien, the *Christian Century* magazine, January 22, 2007

- “To most of its citizens, America is exceptional, and it’s only natural that it should take exception to certain international standards.” – Michael Ignatieff, *Washington Post* columnist, Legal Affairs, May-June, 2002

- Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters, US

Army War College, 1997: “Our country is a force for good without precedent”.

- Thomas Barnett, US Naval War College: “The US military is a force for global good that ... has no equal.” – *The Guardian* (London), December 27, 2005

- John Bolton, future US ambassador to the United Nations, writing in 2000: Because of its unique status, the United States could not be “legally bound” or constrained in any way by its international treaty obligations. The US needed to “be unashamed, unapologetic, uncompromising American constitutional hegemonists,” so that their “senior decision makers” could be free to use force unilaterally.

- Condoleezza Rice, future US Secretary of State, writing in 2000, was equally contemptuous of international law. She claimed that in the pursuit of its national security the United States no longer needed to be guided by “notions of international law and norms” or “institutions like the United Nations” because it was “on the right side of history.” – *Z Magazine*, July/August 2004

- “The president [George W. Bush] said he didn’t want other countries dictating terms or conditions for the war on terrorism. ‘At some point, we may be the only ones left. That’s okay with me. We are America.’” – *Washington Post*, January 31, 2002

- “Reinhold Niebuhr got it right a half-century ago: What persists – and promises no end of grief – is our conviction that Providence has summoned America to tutor all of humankind on its pilgrimage to perfection.” – Andrew Bacevich, professor of international relations, Boston University

- In commenting on Woodrow Wilson’s moral lecturing of his European colleagues at the Versailles peace table following the First World War, Winston Churchill remarked that he found it hard to believe that the European emigrants, who brought to America the virtues of the lands from which they sprang, had left behind all their vices. – *The World Crisis*, Vol. V, *The After-*

*math*, 1929

- “Behold a republic, gradually but surely becoming the supreme moral factor to the world’s progress and the accepted arbiter of the world’s disputes.” – William Jennings Bryan, US Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson, *In His Image* (1922)

- Newsweek editor Michael Hirsch: “US allies must accept that some US unilateralism is inevitable, even desirable. This mainly involves accepting the reality of America’s supreme might – and truthfully, appreciating how historically lucky they are to be protected by such a relatively benign power.” – *Foreign Affairs*, November, 2002

- Colin Powell speaking before the Republican National Convention, August 13, 1996: The United States is “a country that exists by the grace of a divine providence.”

- “The US media always has an underlying acceptance of the mythology of American exceptionalism, that the US, in everything it does, is the last best hope of humanity.” – Rahul Mahajan, author of: *The New Crusade: America’s War on Terrorism, and Full Spectrum Dominance*

- “The fundamental problem is that the Americans do not respect anybody except themselves,” said Col. Mir Jan, a spokesman for the Afghan Defense Ministry. “They say, ‘We are the God of the world,’ and they don’t consult us.” – *Washington Post*, August 3, 2002

- “If we have to use force, it is because we are America! We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future.” – Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State, 1998

**CT**

**William Blum** is the author of: “*Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*”; “*Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*”; “*West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*”; “*Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*.” Signed copies may be purchased at [www.killinghope.org](http://www.killinghope.org)

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**“There is troubling evidence suggesting that studies are still going on, but there is nothing that indicates that Iran is really building a bomb. Those who want to drum up support for a bombing attack on Iran sort of aggressively misrepresented the report”**  
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# Touchy-feely propaganda

Philip Kraske contrasts one nation's televised tears with another's prime-time presidential interview

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**The trick to propaganda is that it can never look like propaganda. And it works best if the people presenting it don't consider it that way either**  
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One of the intellectual pleasures of being an American living abroad – I live in Spain – is to observe the subtleties of your own country's propaganda efforts.

I was reminded of this smarmy side of the American political game the other day when I saw that North Korean news anchorwoman crying on television as she announced the death of President Kim Jung Il. You had to wonder if she would take the death of her own father any harder.

That was the point of the scene, of course: the Dear Leader's death was like your own father's. It was the point for North Koreans, that is. The rest of the world probably found it – let's be charitable, a man died – melodramatic.

But that's the fascinating thing about international politics: how each nation retains, generation after generation, its personality; how it cannot think, though it can feel; how certain sentiments root so deeply in one national psyche and wither without a trace in the next. Koreans apparently react to tearful displays; Americans react to cool leaders who play saxophone or make snappy speeches.

Some countries don't need personal identification with their leaders. In Spain, of the six men who have been president, only one, Felipe Gonzalez, had any sort of personal charisma. Presidents here are just heads of

the political parties that win elections. It is King Juan Carlos, jovial and distinguished, that personifies the country and that people relate to personally. And the mainstream media, as everywhere, plays its propaganda role bathing him in kingly mystique.

The trick to propaganda is that it can never look like propaganda. And it works best if the people presenting it don't consider it that way either. I would imagine that the Korean anchorwoman really was deeply moved, and if the director had to tell her to save her tears till he gave her the on-the-air countdown, it was only the reverential thing to do.

.....  
**American parallel**

The image of the crying anchorwoman finds its American parallel in President Barack Obama's interview on 60 Minutes with Steve Kroft a week after the raid on Osama bin Laden's (ugly) house in Pakistan last May.

Is it hard to think of 60 Minutes, that scion of investigative journalism, as a propaganda mouthpiece? That's exactly the point: it doesn't look like one. And just as the North Korean television director told the woman to put everything she had into reading the death announcement, no doubt Kroft saw the post-raid interview as his duty as a patriot and a newsman.

I wonder how the questions were prepared. In cooperation with Obama's people, as with the recent Jay Leno interview? If Obama didn't submit the questions, he certainly had advance warning on them.

And what questions! The killing of bin Laen was an event that, big or small in the general sweep of events, was certainly key to America's sense of 9-11 closure, not to mention Obama's re-election. Questions swirled – and swirl still – around the raid; yet Kroft, who like all the 60 Minutes guys goes tooth and nail after fraudsters, mobsters, gangsters and sundry sleazeballs, played the softest of softballs with the president.

A violin might have been playing in the background when he asked Obama, "This was your decision – whether to proceed or not and how to proceed. What was the most difficult part of that decision?" (To give Obama his due, he occasionally seemed uncomfortable with Kroft's hyper-sensitive, muscular portrayal of him.)

The reason it was difficult to proceed was, as Obama had just mentioned, "We didn't have a photograph of bin Laden in that building. There was no direct evidence of his presence. And so the CIA continued to build the case meticulously over the course of several months."

Kroft never asked how it was that, in months of surveillance of the house in Abbottabad, the CIA had never taken a photo of bin Laden, never recorded his voice. In all that time, no thin, six-foot-six bearded gent ever once passed in front of an open window? With all the super hi-tech devices available to the CIA – the American CIA, that is, not the CIA of, say, Cameroon or Paraguay – no recording of his voice was ever made?

All they needed was to match up a voice print of bin Laden yelling "Anybody see where I left my glasses?" or telling the kids to eat their spinach because the Prophet Mohammed did, and look how far he went. If I had been president, and if the greatest intelligence-gathering agency in the world

could not find a trace of one man in one house over a period of months, I would have concluded that he wasn't there and called off the mission.

But "direct proof" would have had to be presented to the public, wouldn't it? There was the rub. And as we saw with the faked dead bin Laden photograph briefly floated on the Internet and quickly torn to shreds by sour conspiracy theorists, presenting direct proof was only asking for trouble. So somewhere the decision was made to lie by omission. And to give this crucial absence covering fire, it was couched – by Kroft and the mainstream media – in terms of how difficult the lack of evidence made the president's decision.

Not that I'm criticizing: I've used that technique myself in two novels.

Still, let's not be too hard on Kroft. In American political culture, the president's word is never to be called into question, and especially not during a Presidential Soulful Chat in the Roosevelt Room. Imagine the reaction – the calls, the emails, the outcry – if Kroft had pulled the president up short and said, "Wait a minute, Mr. President. Are you telling me that you sent two helicopters of men to raid a place when after several months of hi-tech surveillance no trace of Osama bin Laden had been found? You sent those men on the strength of a story about a bin Laden courier?" That would have been Kroft's last 60 Minutes segment.

**Pouring the syrup**

Steve Kroft knows how to read the landscape. His job was to pour the syrup, and he had an XL bottle of it:

**KROFT:** Was it hard keeping your focus?

**PRESIDENT OBAMA:** Yes. Yeah.

**KROFT:** Did you have to suppress the urge to tell someone? Did you want to tell somebody? Did you want to tell Michelle? Did you tell Michelle?

**PRESIDENT OBAMA:** You know one

.....  
**Kroft never asked how it was that, in months of surveillance of the house in Abbottabad, the CIA had never taken a photo of bin Laden, never recorded his voice**  
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## PROPAGANDA RULES

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**Skepticism, in American political culture, has to await other venues and other days**  
.....

of the great successes of this operation was that we were able to keep this thing secret. And it's a testimony to how seriously everybody took this operation and the understanding that any leak could end up not only compromising the mission, but killing some of the guys that we were sending in there.

What a sweet, cuddly man, our president is – Kroft too, since he let Obama dodge the question about Michelle. And that bit about “keeping focus” – that speaks for itself. Can you imagine Kroft asking a dishonest stock broker if it was hard keeping his focus while robbing a seventy-year-old lady of her pension?

And then there was the nonsense about the dead-bin Laden-photos circulated in the White House and deemed too ugly for public release. And here the exchange between Kroft and Obama truly smells of collusion:

**KROFT:** Did you see the pictures?

**PRESIDENT OBAMA:** Yes.

**KROFT:** What was your reaction when you saw them?

**PRESIDENT OBAMA:** It was him.

That was Obama's reaction? What an odd thing to say. If you had asked me about my reaction to a photo of a dead man shot in the head, I would have said, “Horrible. It made me sick.” And if Abbottabad had been a real

raid – fully, not to say easily, documented – and if there were no question that they had taken bin Laden, that is roughly what Obama would have said.

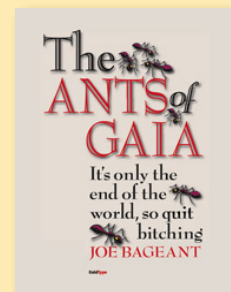
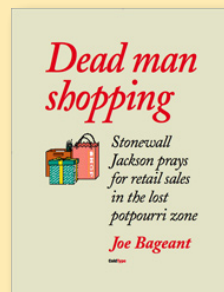
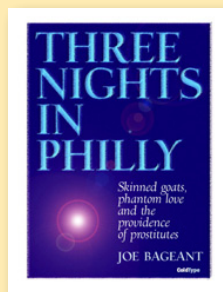
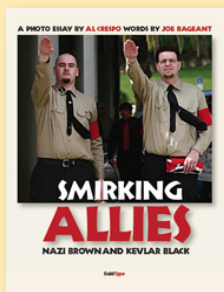
Yet Obama's “reaction” was to use the question to insist it was really bin Laden. Which says to me that it wasn't. Apart from the gaps in the official story is the evidence that points to the probable death of bin Laden at the end of 2001. But skepticism, in American political culture, has to await other venues and other days. Kroft said nothing; Obama had made his point.

And Obama, who knows a thing or two about making a good impression, continued to make hay while the 60 Minutes sun was shining:

**PRESIDENT OBAMA:** That's not who we are. You know, we don't trot out this stuff as trophies. You know, the fact of the matter is this was somebody who was deserving of the justice that he received. And I think Americans and people around the world are glad that he's gone. But we don't need to spike the football.

Which he himself had just spiked, with Steve Kroft's help. **CT**

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*Philip Kraske's latest book, Flight in February, is now available from Amazon (See advert on Page 32)*



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# The prime time war

With Libya recently dealt with (“It worked,” said the Guardian), Iran is next, it seems, writes **John Pilger**

On 22 May 2007, the *Guardian*’s front page announced: “Iran’s secret plan for summer offensive to force US out of Iraq”. The writer, Simon Tisdall, claimed that Iran had secret plans to defeat American troops in Iraq, which included “forging ties with al-Qaeda elements”.

The coming “showdown” was an Iranian plot to influence a vote in the US Congress. Based entirely on briefings by anonymous US officials, Tisdall’s “exclusive” rippled with lurid tales of Iran’s “murder cells” and “daily acts of war against US and British forces”. His 1,200 words included just 20 for Iran’s flat denial.

It was a load of rubbish: in effect, a Pentagon press release presented as journalism and reminiscent of the notorious fiction that justified the bloody invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Among Tisdall’s sources were “senior advisers” to General David Petraeus, the US military commander who, in 2006, described his strategy of waging a “war of perceptions . . . conducted continuously using the news media”.

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## Theatre of the absurd

The media war against Iran began in 1979, when the west’s placeman Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was overthrown in a

popular Islamic revolution. The “loss” of Iran, which, under the shah, was regarded as the “fourth pillar” of western control of the Middle East, has never been forgiven in Washington and London.

Last month, the *Guardian*’s front page carried another “exclusive”: “MoD prepares to take part in US strikes against Iran”

Again, only anonymous officials were quoted. This time, the theme was the “threat” posed by the prospect of an Iranian nuclear weapon.

The latest “evidence” is warmed-over documents obtained from a laptop in 2004 by US intelligence and passed to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Numerous authorities have cast doubt on these suspected forgeries, including a former IAEA chief weapons inspector. A US diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks describes the new head of the IAEA, Yukiya Amano, as “solidly in the US court” and “ready for prime time”.

The *Guardian*’s 3 November “exclusive” and the speed with which its propaganda spread across the media were also prime time. This is known as “information dominance” by the media trainers at the Ministry of Defence’s psyops (psychological warfare) establishment at Chicksands, Bedfordshire, who share their premises with the instructors of the interrogation

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**It is hardly surprising that the MoD, in a 2,000-page document leaked to WikiLeaks, describes investigative journalists – that is, journalists who do their job – as a “threat” greater than terrorism**  
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methods that have led to a public inquiry into British military torture in Iraq. Disinformation and the barbarity of colonial warfare have historically had much in common.

Having beckoned a criminal assault on Iran, the *Guardian* opined that this “would of course be madness”. Similar arse-covering was deployed when Tony Blair, once a “mystical” hero in polite liberal circles, plotted with George W Bush and caused a bloodbath in Iraq. With Libya recently dealt with (“It worked,” said the *Guardian*), Iran is next, it seems.

The role of respectable journalism in western state crimes – from Iraq to Iran, Afghanistan to Libya – remains taboo. It is currently deflected by the theatre of the Leveson inquiry, which the *Telegraph’s* Benedict Brogan describes as “a useful stress test”. Blame Rupert Murdoch and the tabloids for everything and business can continue as usual.

As disturbing as the stories are from Lord Leveson’s witness stand, they do not compare with the suffering of the countless faraway victims of journalism’s war-mongering.

The lawyer Phil Shiner, who has forced a public inquiry into the British military’s criminal behaviour in Iraq, says that embedded journalism provides the cover for the killing of “hundreds of civilians . . . by British forces when they had custody of them, [often subjecting them] to the most extraordinary, brutal things, involving sexual acts . . . Embedded journalism is never ever going to get close to hearing their story.” It is hardly surprising that the MoD, in a 2,000-page document leaked to WikiLeaks, describes investigative journalists – that is, journalists who do their job – as a “threat” greater than terrorism.

.....  
**Wall of silence**

In the week the *Guardian* published its

“exclusive” about Iran, General Sir David Richards, Britain’s highly political military chief, went on a secret visit to Israel, a genuine nuclear weapons outlaw that is exempt from media opprobrium. No national newspaper in Britain revealed that he went to Israel to discuss plans for an attack on Iran.

Honourable exceptions aside – such as the tenacious work of the *Guardian’s* Ian Cobain and Richard Norton-Taylor – our increasingly militarised society is reflected in much of our media culture. Two of Blair’s most important functionaries in his mendacious, blood-drenched adventure in Iraq, Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell, enjoy a cosy relationship with the liberal media, their opinions sought on worthy subjects while the blood in Iraq never dries. For their vicarious admirers, as Harold Pinter put it, the appalling consequences of their actions “never happened”.

On 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the feminist scholars Cynthia Cockburn and Ann Oakley attacked what they called “certain widespread masculine traits and behaviours”, demanding that a “culture of masculinity . . . should be addressed as a policy issue”. Testosterone was the problem.

They made no mention of a system of rampant state violence that has created 740,000 widows in Iraq and threatens whole societies, from Iran to China. Is this not a “culture”, too?

Their limited though not untypical indignation says much about how media-friendly identity or issues politics distracts from the systemic exploitation and war that remain the primary source of violence against both women and men.

**CT**

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*John Pilger* recently received the top prize in the annual awards, presented in London, of the British Grierson Trust for his documentary films



# Zombies ate the economy

Who caused the banking crisis, Wall Street or the man in the street?  
**Joshua Holland** looks at some astonishing accusations

**W**all Street turned a few million home-loans into what Warren Buffet called “economic weapons of mass destruction,” cratered the global economy and then, when the bubble burst, turned around and insisted on a massive bailout courtesy of the American tax-payer.

That rightly infuriated most Americans, but it has nonetheless become something of an article of faith among conservatives that Wall Street bears little blame for the Great Recession. The dominant narrative on the right today is that “big government” is ultimately responsible for the crash. In the words of one of Andrew Breitbart’s bloggers, Democratic lawmakers like Barney Frank and Chris Dodd “brought down the banking industry by forcing banks to give loans to people who couldn’t afford them.”

That such a ludicrous claim could gain such wide traction is a testament to the intellectual debasement of modern conservative discourse. No bank was ever “forced” – or coerced or incentivized by the government in any way – to make a bad loan.

But the claim falls apart even before one digs into the particulars, for the simple reason that people’s mortgages didn’t bring down the banking system in the first place.

The entire subprime mortgage market was worth only \$1.4 trillion in the fall of 2007, and that includes loans that were up-to-date.

As former Goldman Sachs trader Nomi Prins noted in her book, *It Takes a Pillage: Behind the Bailouts, Bonuses, and Backroom Deals from Washington to Wall Street*, the federal government could have bought up every single residential mortgage in the country – good, bad and in between – and it would have cost a trillion less than the bailouts.

Short of that, notes Prins, if the crisis were really about people buying McMansions that they couldn’t afford, “we could have solved it much more cheaply in a couple of days in late 2008, by simply providing borrowers with additional capital to reduce their loan principals. It would have cost about 3 percent of what the entire bailout wound up costing, with comparatively similar risk.”

What brought down the global economy was as much as \$140 trillion worth of financial gimmickry built on top of the mortgage industry. It was the alphabet soup of the credit meltdown – the CDOs, default swaps and other derivatives that made less than a trillion dollars of foreclosed loans into an economic weapon of mass destruction that would cost the American economy alone \$14 trillion in lost wealth.

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**Deregulation**

A fair criticism of the government’s role is that it didn’t “meddle” in the free market sufficiently to protect borrowers, investors

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**In 1999, after 12 unsuccessful attempts, Glass-Steagall, which would have made the crash of 2007-2009 impossible, was finally repealed**  
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and the public – that \$140 trillion house of cards was built in an environment created by decades of deregulation. But that situation is also the fault of Wall Street rather than an indication of the perfidy of “big government.” It was bought at great cost by the banking lobby (and as powerful chairs of congressional banking committees, the right’s bogeymen, Barney Frank and Chris Dodd, are two of the financial industry’s top recipients).

One could argue that the meltdown began with a chance meeting in 1997 in a line for coffee at Bank of America’s Chicago headquarters. According to the *Financial Times*’ Gillian Tett, a chance encounter brought together people working in BofA’s derivatives group with another team that was packaging mortgages into securities. From that meeting, as Tett wrote, “a new game was born: bankers began to use subprime loans to create these bundles of loan default risk, now called collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) on an explosively large scale.”

Present at that meeting was Robert Reoch, a trader who had come over from JPMorgan. In the mid-1990s, JPMorgan had found itself holding an abundance of loans on its books, which made it difficult to maintain the reserves required by banking regulators. They had come up with the idea of selling some of the risk of those loans off to investors, by bundling them into mortgage-backed securities. This had two consequences that would eventually lead to the almost universally loathed Wall Street bailouts, a massive drop in employment, the foreclosure crisis and a skyrocketing deficit.

But the real origin of the crisis took place several years earlier. In 1994, some of the first derivatives – which allowed investors to gamble on interest rates – produced massive losses when currency markets began fluctuating wildly. Calls to regulate this shadowy field of financial speculation followed, but, as Tett noted, “the International Swaps and Derivatives Association fought back furiously, arguing that a regulatory clampdown would not only run counter to the spirit of

capital markets, but also crush creativity.”

On the board of ISDA – whose lobbying expenditures more than doubled in 2010 to \$2.4 million, as new rules on derivatives were being hammered out by federal regulators – sits managing directors of JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup and Bank of America Merrill Lynch, among other financial firms.

Its successful campaign against regulations on derivatives in the mid-1990s was only one battle in a long campaign to deregulate investment banking that dated back to the 1960s, when lobbyists reportedly bragged that the effort was putting their kids through college. Their primary target was the Glass-Steagall Act, a depression-era law that created a firewall between investment banking and the commercial banks that hold deposits and make loans. Their first victory came in 1986, when, under intense lobbying from Wall Street, the Federal Reserve reinterpreted a key section of the act, deciding that commercial banks could make up to 5 percent of their gross revenues from investment banking. After the board heard arguments from Citicorp, J.P. Morgan and Bankers Trust, it loosened the restrictions further – in 1989, the limit was raised to 10 percent of revenues; in 1996, they hiked it up to 25 percent.

According to a report by PBS *Frontline*, “in the 1997-98 election cycle, the finance, insurance, and real estate industries (known as the FIRE sector), spends more than \$200 million on lobbying and makes more than \$150 million in political donations. Campaign contributions are targeted to members of congressional banking committees and other committees with direct jurisdiction over financial services legislation.”

In 1999, after 12 unsuccessful attempts, Glass-Steagall, which would have made the crash of 2007-2009 impossible, was finally repealed. And it was only then that the explosion in shaky mortgage-backed securities began. “Subprime” loans made up 5 percent of the total the year before repeal, but skyrocketed to 30 percent of all mortgages at the

time of the crash.

Jeb Hensarling, a notably obtuse Republican lawmaker from Texas, wrote that “the conservative case [against the government] is simple:

“The [Community Reinvestment Act] compelled banks to relax their traditional underwriting practices in favor of more “flexible” criteria. These subjective standards were then applied to all borrowers, not just low-income individuals, leading to a surge in lower-quality loans. ... Blame should [also be] directed at Fannie [Mae] and Freddie [Mac], and their thirst for weaker underwriting to help meet their federally mandated “affordable housing” goals...”

This tale has everything a conservative could want: Big Government overreach and well-intentioned but out-of-touch liberals causing devastating unanticipated consequences with their social tinkering.

But, contrary to the conservative spin, University of Michigan law professor Michael Barr told a congressional committee that although there was in fact quite a bit of irresponsible lending in low-income communities in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, “More than half of subprime loans were made by independent mortgage companies not subject to comprehensive federal supervision; another 30 percent of such originations were made by affiliates of banks or thrifts, which are not subject to routine examination or supervision, and the remaining 20 percent were made by banks and thrifts [subject to CRA standards].” Barr concluded, “The worst and most widespread abuses occurred in the institutions with the least federal oversight.”

The reality is that no bank has ever been “forced to comply with government mandates about mortgage lending” – it’s a bald-faced lie. There are no “government mandates,” and there never were. In order to qualify for government-backed deposit insurance – a benefit that banks aren’t forced to accept but enjoy having – the Community Reinvestment Act – and similar measures

designed to prevent discrimination in lending (to qualified individuals) – only encourage banks to lend in all of the areas where they do business. And Section 802 (b) of the Act stresses that all loans must be “consistent with safe and sound operations” – it’s the opposite of requiring that lenders write risky mortgages.

There are no penalties for noncompliance with CRA guidelines. The only “stick” hanging over banks that fail to meet those standards is that their refusal might be taken into account by regulators when they want to open new branches or merge with other financial institutions. What’s more, there are no defined standards for CRA compliance, and within the banking community, the loose guidelines are considered to be somewhat of a joke.

As Sheila Blair, the chairwoman of the FDIC, asked in a December 2008 speech, “Where in the CRA does it say: make loans to people who can’t afford to repay? Nowhere! And the fact is, the lending practices that are causing problems today were driven by a desire for market share and revenue growth, pure and simple.”

**Fannie and Freddie:  
Tempted by Easy Profits**

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were created by an act of Congress, but they are (or were, until being taken over in the wake of the housing crash) private, for-profit entities whose dual mandate was to increase the availability of mortgages to moderate- and low-income families, and at the same time turn a profit for their shareholders. Fannie and Freddie did end up with a very large portfolio of subprime loans, with a high rate of default, but they didn’t get into the market early, or because the government mandated it. They dived in deep because there were profits to be made as the housing bubble expanded. As Mary Kane, a finance reporter for the Washington Independent, put it:

Neither the Community Reinvestment

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**No bank has ever been “forced to comply with government mandates about mortgage lending” – it’s a bald-faced lie**  
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**The bankers’  
hard sell created  
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loans to just about  
anybody for just  
about anything**  
.....

Act – the law most cited as the culprit – nor other affordable housing goals set by the government forced Fannie, Freddie or any other lender to make loans they didn’t want to. The lure of the subprime market was high yields and healthy profit margins – it’s as simple as that.

.....  
**Creating a Market**  
.....

None of this is to suggest that millions of Americans didn’t bite off more than they would eventually be able to chew in the housing market. A lot of people looking to turn a quick buck by capturing the booming value of real estate in the mid- to late-2000s bought property with “teaser” loans that offered very low rates for the first few years; the investors assumed they’d be able to turn a tidy profit before higher interest rates kicked in. Many of those individuals have since found themselves “under water” – owing more on their homes (and investment properties) than they’re worth.

Yet, as *Salon* business reporter Andrew Leonard wrote, beginning in the 1990s, “The incentive for everyone to behave this way came from Wall Street where the demand for (debt-backed securities) simply couldn’t be satisfied. Wall Street was begging the mortgage industry to reach out to the riskiest borrowers it could find, because it thought it had figured out a way to make any level of risk palatable.” He added, “Wall Street traders, hungry for more risk, fixed the real economy to deliver more risk, by essentially bribing the mortgage originators and ratings agencies to make bad loans on purpose. That supplied (Wall Street) speculators the raw material they needed for their bets, but as a consequence threw the integrity of the whole housing sector into question.”

The bankers’ hard sell created so much demand that lenders wrote loans to just about anybody for just about anything; loans, after all, were the raw material for the alphabet soup of exotic investment vehicles: the “collateralized debt obligations (CDOs),”

“credit default swaps,” and other innovative products that turned “toxic” toward the end of the decade. Wall Street had little to lose by giving investors more of these fancy new bets. Wall Street traders made their fees, and as long as the housing market – the hard assets underpinning all of the theoretical wealth that was created – held up, everyone was happy.

The most important point here is that the bankers knew they were playing with fire. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Before Washington Mutual collapsed in the largest bank failure in US history, its executives knowingly created a ‘mortgage time bomb’ by making subprime loans they knew were likely to go bad and then packaging them into risky securities.”

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, US prosecutors are, as of this writing, investigating whether Morgan Stanley misled investors about mortgage-derivatives deals it helped design and sometimes bet against.” And the Securities and Exchange Commission charged Goldman Sachs with “defrauding investors by misstating and omitting key facts about a financial product tied to subprime mortgages as the US housing market was beginning to falter.”

They needed some help laundering the risk out of those shaky loans, and they got it. According to a Senate investigation concluded earlier this year S&P and Moody’s, the two dominant ratings agencies, “issued the AAA ratings that made ... mortgage backed securities ... seem like safe investments, helped build an active market for those securities, and then, beginning in July 2007, downgraded the vast majority of those AAA ratings to junk status.” And when they did so, it “precipitated the collapse of the [mortgage-backed securities] markets and, perhaps more than any other single event, triggered the financial crisis (PDF).”

According to the Senate investigation, in the years leading up to crash, “warnings about the massive problems in the mortgage industry” – including internal warnings

from their own analysts – had been ignored because of “the inherent conflict of interest arising from the system used to pay for credit ratings.” The big “rating agencies were paid by the Wall Street firms” that were making a fortune selling that glossed-up garbage to credulous investors. This, again, was Wall Street’s doing rather than a result of some public policy passed by Congress.

This isn’t about ideology; it’s about pushing back on some notably dangerous historical revisionism. Because there is one thing that’s as sure as death and taxes: Big Finance’s lobbyists will continue to resist calls

to re-regulate the financial sector. And absent effective regulation of the financial markets, we can expect to continue to suffer through an endless series of booms and busts, while the fat cats of Wall Street continue to get fatter. **CT**

*Joshua Holland is an editor and senior writer at AlterNet.org, where this essay was first published. He is the author of “The 15 Biggest Lies About the Economy: And Everything else the Right Doesn’t Want You to Know About Taxes, Jobs and Corporate America”*

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