

THE
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READER

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5 JULY 2007

A bloody media mirror

MANY OF America's most prominent journalists want us to forget what they were saying and writing more than four years ago to boost the invasion of Iraq. Now, they tiptoe around their own roles in hyping the war and banishing dissent to the media margins.

The media watch group FAIR (where I'm an associate) has performed a public service in the latest edition of its magazine *Extra*. The organization's activism director, Peter Hart, drew on FAIR's extensive research to assemble a sample of notable quotations from media cheerleading for the Iraq invasion. One of the earliest quotes to merit special attention came from ace New York Times reporter – and chronic Pentagon promoter – Michael Gordon. In a CNN appearance on March 25, 2003, just a few days into the invasion, Gordon gave his easy blessing to the invaders' bombing of Iraqi TV.

Gordon cited "what I've seen of Iraqi television, with Saddam Hussein presenting propaganda to his people and showing off the Apache helicopter and claiming a farmer shot it down and trying to persuade his own public that he was really in charge, when we're trying to send the exact opposite message" – and so, the Times reporter went on, Iraqi TV was "an appropriate target."

Let's unpack Gordon's rationale for a military attack on Iraqi broadcasters: They pre-

sented propaganda to viewers, aired triumphal images and touted the authority of the top man in the government, while an adversary was "trying to send the exact opposite message." By those standards, Iraqis would have been justified in targeting any one of the American cable news networks, most especially Fox News Channel.

Hart – who is author of the book "The Oh Really? Factor: Unspinning Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly" – includes some quotes from Fox in his collection of war-crazed statements from media. For instance, soon after the invasion began, Fox News commentator Fred Barnes declared: "The American public knows how important this war is, and is not as casualty sensitive as the weenies in the American press are." (Unsurpassed bravery is a common denominator of rabid hawks in stateside TV studios.) But many of Hart's examples are from U.S. media outlets with reputations for judicious professional journalism.

On NBC News, Brian Williams was singing from the choir book provided by U.S. officials. "They are calling this the cleanest war in all of military history," Williams said on April 2, 2003. "They stress they're fighting a regime and not the people, using smart bombs, not dumb, older munitions. But there have been and will be accidents. ... And there's a new weapon in this war: Arab media, especially Al Jazeera. It's

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on all the time, and unlike American media, it hardly reflects the Pentagon line. Its critics say it accentuates civilian casualties and provokes outrage on the Arab street.”

The next day, on the same network, Williams’ colleague Katie Couric was more succinct in her fawning. Viewers of the “Today” program listened as she interviewed a U.S. military official and exclaimed: “Thank you for coming on the show. And I want to add, I think the Special Forces rock!”

A week later, on MSNBC, the hardballer Chris Matthews was swept up in beach-ball euphoria as America’s armed forces toppled the Saddam regime. “We’re all neo-cons now,” Matthews exulted.

At the start of May 2003, when President Bush zoomed onto an aircraft carrier and stood near a “Mission Accomplished” banner, Lou Dobbs was quick to tell CNN viewers: “He looked like an alternatively commander in chief, rock star, movie star and one of the guys.”

On the same day, journalist Matthews assumed the royal “we” – and, in the opportunistic process, blew with the prevailing wind. “We’re proud of our president,” he said. “Americans love having a guy as president, a guy who has a little swagger, who’s physical, who’s not a complicated guy like Clinton or even like Dukakis or Mondale, all those guys, McGovern. They want a guy who’s president. Women like a guy who’s president. Check it out. The women like this

war. I think we like having a hero as our president. It’s simple.” All too simple.

Perhaps no journalist was more shameless in echoing President Bush’s fatuous claims about the invasion than Christopher Hitchens.

“Many Iraqis can hear me tonight in a translated radio broadcast, and I have a message for them: If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you,” Bush said on March 17, 2003.

The next day, Hitchens came out with an essay declaring that “the Defense Department has evolved highly selective and accurate munitions that can sharply reduce the need to take or receive casualties. The predictions of widespread mayhem turned out to be false last time – when the weapons [in the Gulf War] were nothing like so accurate.” And, Hitchens proclaimed, “it can now be proposed as a practical matter that one is able to fight against a regime and not a people or a nation.”

More than four years – and at least several hundred thousand Iraqi civilian deaths – later, the most reliable epidemiology available confirms that those claims were more than misleading. They were fundamentally out of touch with human reality.

If you had engaged in such cheerleading for the launch of the Iraq war in early 2003, by now you might also be eager to change the subject and argue about God.



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From the grave: Bloody hands on Capitol Hill

IT WAS a chilling moment on a split-screen of history. While the Senate debated the Iraq war on Tuesday night, a long-dead senator again renounced a chronic lie about congressional options and presidential power. The Senate was in the final hours of another failure to impede the momentum of war. As the New York Times was to report, President Bush “essentially won the added time he said he needed to demonstrate that his troop buildup was succeeding.”

Meanwhile, inside a movie theater on the opposite coast, the thunderous voice of Senator Wayne Morse spoke to 140 people at an event organized by the activist group Sacramento for Democracy. The extraordinary senator was speaking in May 1964 – and in July 2007.

A typical dash of media conventional wisdom had set him off. The moderator of the CBS program “Face the Nation,” journalist Peter Lisagor, told the guest: “Senator, the Constitution gives to the president of the United States the sole responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy.”

“Couldn’t be more wrong,” Morse shot back. “You couldn’t make a more unsound legal statement than the one you have just made. This is the promulgation of an old fallacy that foreign policy belongs to the president of the United States. That’s nonsense.”

Lisagor sounded a bit exasperated: “To

whom does it belong, then, Senator?”

Again, Morse didn’t hesitate. “It belongs to the American people,” the senator fired back. And he added: “What I’m saying is – under our Constitution all the president is, is the administrator of the people’s foreign policy, those are his prerogatives, and I’m pleading that the American people be given the facts about foreign policy –”

“You know, Senator, that the American people cannot formulate and execute foreign policy –”

“Why do you say that? Why, you’re a man of little faith in democracy if you make that kind of comment,” Morse retorted. “I have complete faith in the ability of the American people to follow the facts if you’ll give them. And my charge against my government is we’re not giving the American people the facts.”

As Wayne Morse spoke, applause pulsed through the theater. I’ve seen the same thing happen many times this summer – whether in New York or D.C. or San Luis Obispo or Sacramento – with audiences suddenly bursting into loud applause when they hear Morse near the end of the documentary film (“War Made Easy,” based on my book of the same name).

Even most antiwar activists don’t seem to know anything about Wayne Morse. Whited out of political memory and media history, he was long ago banished to an Or-

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wellian vacuum tube.

Compared to Morse – even today, more than four years into the horrendous Iraq war – almost every “antiwar” member of the U.S. Senate is restrained and unduly deferential to presidential war-making power.

If you doubt that, consider the Senate’s 97-0 vote in mid-July that laid a flagstone on a path toward military confrontation with yet another country: warning Iran that it would be held accountable for an alleged role in attacks on U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

Morse’s exchange with the “Face the Nation” host on May 24, 1964, occurred more than two months before the Gulf of Tonkin resolution sailed through Congress on the basis of presidential lies about a supposed unprovoked attack on U.S. ships in the Tonkin Gulf. Morse was one of only two members of the entire Congress to vote

against that resolution, which served as a green light for massive escalation of the Vietnam War.

As the years of carnage went by, Senator Morse never let up. And so, when a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee neared a close on February 27, 1968, Morse said – on the record – that he did not “intend to put the blood of this war on my hands.”

A big media lie is that members of Congress are doing all they can when they try and fail to pass measures that would impose a schedule for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. The Constitution gives Congress the power to pay for war – and to stop a war by refusing to appropriate money for it. Every vote to pay for more war is soaked with blood.

Wayne Morse knew that truth – and said it out loud. Today, few senators come close.



24 JULY 2007

Media corrections we'd like to see

FORMER READERS of Mad Magazine can remember a regular feature called “Scenes We’d Like to See.” It showed what might happen if candor replaced customary euphemisms and evasions. These days, what media scenes would we like to see?

One aspect of news media that needs a different paradigm is the correction ritual. Newspapers are sometimes willing to acknowledge faulty reporting, but the “correction box” is routinely inadequate – the journalistic equivalent of self-flagellation for jaywalking in the course of serving as an accessory to deadly crimes.

Some daily papers are scrupulous about correcting the smallest factual errors that have made it into print. So, we learn that a first name was misspelled or a date was wrong or a person was misidentified in a photo caption. However, we rarely encounter a correction that addresses a fundamental flaw in what passes for ongoing journalism. Here are some of the basic corrections that we’d really like to see:

* “Yesterday’s paper included a business section but failed to also include a labor section. Yet the vast majority of Americans work without investing for a living. They are employees rather than entrepreneurs. The failure to recognize such realities when using newsroom resources is not journalis-

tically defensible. The Daily Bugle regrets the error.”

* “On Thursday, in a lengthy story about the economy, this newspaper quoted three corporate executives, two Wall Street business analysts and someone from a corporate-funded think tank. But the article did not quote a single low-income person or a single advocate for those mired in poverty. The Daily Bugle regrets the error.”

* “On Sunday, in a front-page article about the mayor’s proposals for a sweeping new urban-renewal program, The Daily Bugle devoted 27 paragraphs to the potential impacts on real estate interests, store owners and investors. Yet the story devoted scant attention to the foreseeable effects of the project on poor people, many of whom have been living in the affected neighborhoods for generations.”

* “Last week, The Daily Bugle reported on the history of human rights violations in Latin America without noting the pivotal roles played by the U.S. government in supporting despotic regimes during the 20th century. Such selective reporting had the effect of airbrushing significant aspects of the historical record.”

* “Yesterday, when The Daily Bugle printed

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a correction about an obituary, it supplied the proper spelling of the first name of the deceased's daughter. However, the correction failed to correct the obituary's evasive summary of his lethal Machiavellian activities as a top official of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Daily Bugle regrets the error."

* "For nearly five years, The Daily Bugle has frequently printed the headline 'Deaths in Iraq' over the latest listing of confirmed American deaths in Iraq. This headline has been insidiously misleading because it propagates the attitude that the only 'deaths in Iraq' worth reporting by name are the deaths of Americans. Such tacit jingoism and nationalistic narcissism have no place in quality news reporting. The Daily Bugle regrets its participation in this repetition compulsion disorder of American journalism."

* "The Daily Bugle's reporting has often re-

ferred to Senator Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.) as 'a respected senator on foreign affairs.' In fact, while some observers greatly respect Senator Lugar, others view him as a chronic hand-wringer whose pathetic deference to presidential militarism has aided and abetted the latest war crimes ordered from the Oval Office."

* "For more than five years, readers of this newspaper have encountered – without attribution – frequent references to 'the war on terrorism' and 'the war on terror.' While avidly used by architects and supporters of the U.S. government's military actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, such phrases are based on assumptions that could be substantively and effectively refuted. The Daily Bugle regrets that its news pages have relentlessly promoted such official buzzwords as though they were objective realities instead of terms devised to manipulate the public for endless war."



26 JULY 2007

Media spin on Iraq: We're leaving (sort of)

IN MID-JULY, a media advisory from the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer announced a new series of interviews on the PBS show that will address “what Iraq might look like when the U.S. military leaves.”

A few days later, Time magazine published a cover story titled “Iraq: What will happen when we leave.”

But it turns out, what will happen when we leave is that we won't leave.

Urging a course of action that's now supported by “the best strategic minds in both parties,” the Time story calls for “an orderly withdrawal of about half the 160,000 troops currently in Iraq by the middle of 2008.” And: “A force of 50,000 to 100,000 troops would dig in for a longer stay to protect America's most vital interests...”

On Iraq policy, in Washington, the differences between Republicans and Democrats – and between the media's war boosters and opponents – are often significant. Yet they're apt to mask the emergence of a general formula that could gain wide support from the political and media establishment.

The formula's details and timelines are up for grabs. But there's not a single “major” candidate for president willing to call for withdrawal of all U.S. forces – not just “combat” troops – from Iraq, or willing to call for a complete halt to U.S. bombing of that country.

Those candidates know that powerful elites in this country just don't want to give up the leverage of an ongoing U.S. military presence in Iraq, with its enormous reserves of oil and geopolitical value. It's a good bet that American media and political powerhouses would fix the wagon of any presidential campaign that truly advocated an end to the U.S. war in – and on – Iraq.

The disconnect between public opinion and elite opinion has led to reverse perceptions of a crisis of democracy. As war continues, some are appalled at the absence of democracy while others are frightened by the potential of it. From the grassroots, the scarcity of democracy is transparent and outrageous. For elites, unleashed democracy could jeopardize the priorities of the military-industrial-media complex.

Converging powerful forces in Washington – eager to at least superficially bridge the gap between grassroots and elite priorities – are likely to come up with a game plan for withdrawing from Iraq without withdrawing from Iraq.

Scratch the surface of current media scenarios for a U.S. pullout from Iraq, and you're left with little more than speculation – fueled by giant dollops of political manipulation. In fact, strategic leaks and un-attributed claims about U.S. plans for withdrawal have emerged periodically to release some steam from domestic antiwar pressures.

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Nearly three years ago – with discontent over the war threatening to undermine President Bush’s prospects for a second term – the White House ally Robert Novak floated a rosy scenario in his nationally syndicated column that appeared on Sept. 20, 2004. “Inside the Bush administration policy-making apparatus, there is strong feeling that U.S. troops must leave Iraq next year,” he wrote. “This determination is not predicated on success in implanting Iraqi democracy and internal stability. Rather, the officials are saying: Ready or not, here we go.”

Novak’s column went on to tell readers: “Well-placed sources in the administration are confident Bush’s decision will be to get out.” Those well-placed sources were, of course, unnamed. And for good measure, Novak followed up a month before the November 2004 election with a piece that recycled the gist of his Sept. 20 column and chortled: “Nobody from the administration has officially rejected my column.”

This is all relevant history today as news media are spinning out umpteen scenarios for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. The game involves dangling illusionary references to “withdrawal” in front of the public.

But realities on the ground – and in the air – are quite different. A recent news dispatch from an air base in Iraq, by Charles J. Hanley of the Associated Press, provided a rare look at the high-tech escalation underway. “Away from the headlines and debate over the ‘surge’ in U.S. ground troops,” AP reported on July 14, “the Air Force has quietly built up its hardware inside Iraq, sharply stepped up bombing and laid a foundation for a sustained air campaign in support of American and Iraqi forces.”

In contrast to the spun speculation so popular with U.S. media outlets like Time

and the PBS NewsHour, the AP article cited key information: “Squadrons of attack planes have been added to the in-country fleet. The air reconnaissance arm has almost doubled since last year. The powerful B1-B bomber has been recalled to action over Iraq.”

This kind of development fits a historic pattern – one that had horrific consequences during the war in Vietnam and, unless stopped, will persist for many years to come in Iraq.

Assessing the distant mirror of the Vietnam War, the narration of the new documentary “War Made Easy” (based on my book of the same name) spells out a classic White House maneuver: “Even when calls for withdrawal have eventually become too loud to ignore, officials have put forward strategies for ending war that have had the effect of prolonging it – in some cases, as with the Nixon administration’s strategy of Vietnamization, actually escalating war in the name of ending it.”

Between mid-1969 and mid-1972, American troop levels dropped sharply in Vietnam – while the deadly ferocity of American bombing spiked upward.

The presence of large numbers of U.S. troops in Iraq during the next years is a likelihood fogged up by fanciful media stories asserting – without tangible evidence – that American troops will “pull out” and the U.S. military will “leave” Iraq. The spin routinely glides past such matters as the hugely militarized U.S. embassy in Baghdad, the numerous permanent-mode U.S. bases in Iraq, and the vast array of private-and-often-paramilitary contractors at work there courtesy of U.S. taxpayers. And there’s the rarely mentioned prize of massive oil reserves that top officials in Washington keep their eyes on.

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The matter of U.S. bases in Iraq is a prime example of how events on Capitol Hill have scant effects on war machinery in the context of out-of-control presidential power. “The House voted overwhelmingly on Wednesday to bar permanent United States military bases in Iraq,” the New York Times reported on July 26. But the war makers in the nation’s capital still hold the whip that keeps lashing the dogs of war.

As the insightful analyst Phyllis Bennis points out: “The bill states an important principle opposing the ‘establishment’ of new bases in Iraq and ‘not to exercise United States control of the oil resources of Iraq.’ But it is limited in several ways. It prohibits only those bases which are acknowledged to be for the purpose of permanently stationing U.S. troops in Iraq; therefore any base constructed for temporarily stationing troops, or rotating troops, or anything less than an officially permanent deployment,

would still be accepted. Further, the bill says nothing about the need to decommission the existing U.S. bases already built in Iraq; it only prohibits ‘establishing’ military installations, implying only new ones would be prohibited.”

Despite all the talk about how members of Congress have been turning against the war, few are clearly advocating a genuine end to U.S. military intervention in Iraq. Media outlets will keep telling us that the U.S. government is developing serious plans to “leave” Iraq. But we would be foolish to believe those tall tales. The antiwar movement has an enormous amount of grassroots work to do – changing the political terrain of the United States from the bottom up – before the calculus of political opportunism in Washington determines that it would be more expedient to end the U.S. occupation of Iraq than to keep it going under one guise or another.



2 AUGUST 2007

Media blitz for war: The big guns of August

THIS WEEK the U.S. media establishment is mainlining another fix for the Iraq war: It isn't so bad after all, American military power could turn wrong into right, chronic misleaders now serve as truth-tellers. The hit is that the war must go on. When the White House chief of staff Andrew Card said five years ago that "you don't introduce new products in August," he was explaining the need to defer an all-out PR campaign for invading Iraq until early fall. But this year, August isn't a bad month to launch a sales pitch for a new and improved Iraq war. Bad products must be re-marketed to counteract buyers' remorse.

"War critics" who have concentrated on decrying the lack of U.S. military progress in Iraq are now feeling the hoist from their own petards. But that's to be expected. Those who complain that the war machine is ineffective are asking for more effective warfare even when they think they're demanding peace.

If Michael O'Hanlon and Kenneth Pollack didn't exist, they'd have to be invented. The duo's op-ed piece Monday in the New York Times, under the headline "A War We Just Might Win," was boilerplate work from elite foreign-policy technicians packaging themselves as "two analysts who have harshly criticized the Bush administration's miserable handling of Iraq."

A recent eight-day officially guided tour led them to conclude that "we are finally getting somewhere in Iraq, at least in military terms."

Both men have always been basic supporters of the Iraq war. O'Hanlon is a prolific writer at the Brookings Institution. Pollack's credits include working at the CIA and authoring the 2002 bestseller "The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq." In the years since the candy and flowers failed to materialize, their critiques of the Iraq war have been merely tactical.

The media maneuvers of recent days are eerily similar to scams that worked so well for the Bush administration during the agenda-setting for the invasion. Vice President Cheney and his top underlings kept leaking disinformation about purported Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and links to Al Qaeda – while the New York Times and other key media outlets breathlessly reported the falsehoods as virtual facts. Then Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice and other practitioners of warcraft quickly went in front of TV cameras and microphones to cite the "reporting" in the Times and elsewhere that they had rigged in the first place.

Last Monday, the ink was scarcely dry on the piece by O'Hanlon and Pollack before the savants were making the rounds of TV studios and other media outlets – doing

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their best to perpetuate a war that they'd helped to deceive the country into in the first place.

The next day, Cheney picked up the tag-team baton. Tuesday night, on CNN's "Larry King Live," he declared that the U.S. military "made significant progress now into the course of the summer. . . . Don't take it from me. Look at the piece that appeared yesterday in the New York Times, not exactly a friendly publication – but a piece by Mr. O'Hanlon and Mr. Pollack on the situation in Iraq. They're just back from visiting over there. They both have been strong critics of the war."

On Wednesday, the U.S. News & World Report website noted: "The news that the U.S. death toll in Iraq for July, at 73, is the lowest in eight months spurred several news organizations to present a somewhat optimistic view of the situation in Iraq. The consensus in the coverage appears to be that things are improving militarily, even as the political side of the equation remains troubling."

Such media coverage is a foreshadowing of what's in store big-time this fall when the propaganda machinery of the warfare state goes into high gear. The media echo chamber will reverberate with claims that the military situation is improving, American casualties will be dropping and Iraqi forces will be shouldering more of the burden.

Arguments over whether U.S. forces can prevail in Iraq bypass a truth that no amount of media spin can change: The U.S. war effort in Iraq has always been illegitimate and fundamentally wrong. Whatever the prospects for America's war there, it shouldn't be fought.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. news media were fond of disputes about whether light really existed at the end of the tunnel. Framed that way, the debate could – and did – go on for many years. The most important point to be made was that the United States had no right to be in the tunnel in the first place.

For years now, many opponents of the Iraq war have assumed that the tides of history were shifting and would soon carry American troops home. "President Bush may be the last person in the country to learn that for Americans, if not Iraqis, the war in Iraq is over," New York Times columnist Frank Rich wrote in August 2005. He concluded that the United States as a country "has already made the decision for Mr. Bush. We're outta there."

As I wrote at the time, Rich's storyline was "a complacent message that stands in sharp contrast to the real situation we now face: a U.S. war on Iraq that may persist for a terribly long time. For the Americans still in Iraq, and for the Iraqis still caught in the crossfire of the occupation, the experiences ahead will hardly be compatible with reassuring forecasts made by pundits in the summer of 2005."

Or in the summer of 2007.

Unfortunately, what I wrote two Augusts ago is still true: "We're not 'outta there' – until an antiwar movement in the United States can grow strong enough to make the demand stick."

The American media establishment continues to behave like a leviathan with a monkey on its back – hooked on militarism and largely hostile to the creative intervention that democracy requires.



8 AUGUST 2007

Let us now praise an infamous woman

THE PROBLEM with letting history judge is that so many officials get away with murder in the meantime – while precious few choose to face protracted vilification for pursuing truth and peace.

A grand total of two people in the entire Congress were able to resist a blood-drenched blank check for the Vietnam War. Standing alone on Aug. 7, 1964, senators Ernest Gruening and Wayne Morse voted against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

Forty-three years later, we don't need to go back decades to find a lopsided instance of a lone voice on Capitol Hill standing against war hysteria and the expediency of violent fear. Days after 9/11, at the launch of the so-called "war on terrorism," just one lawmaker – out of 535 – cast a vote against the gathering madness.

"However difficult this vote may be, some of us must urge the use of restraint," she said on the floor of the House of Representatives. The date was Sept. 14, 2001.

She went on: "Our country is in a state of mourning. Some of us must say, Let's step back for a moment, let's just pause just for a minute, and think through the implications of our actions today so that this does not spiral out of control."

And, she said: "As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore."

With all that has happened since then –

with all that has spun out of control, with all the ways that the U.S. government has mimicked the evil it deplores – it's stunning to watch and hear, for a single minute, what this brave Congresswoman had to say.

After speaking those words, Rep. Barbara Lee voted no. And the fevered slanders began immediately. She was called a traitor. Pundits went crazy. Death threats came.

Barbara Lee kept on keeping on. And nearly six years later, she's a key leader of antiwar forces inside and outside Congress. In her own way, she is a political descendent of Sen. Morse, whose denunciations of the Vietnam War are equally inspiring to watch today. The pretexts for starting the wars on Vietnam and Iraq preceded the pretexts for continuing them. While antiwar activism took hold and public opinion shifted against the war effort, the Congress lagged way behind. Today, the need for a cutoff of war funding remains unfulfilled. To watch rarely seen footage of Wayne Morse and Barbara Lee is to see a standard of decency that few of our purported representatives in Congress are meeting.

There's no point in waiting for members of Congress to be heroic. When we're blessed with the living examples of a few genuine visionaries in office, they should inspire us to realize our own possibilities. Ultimately, our own actions – and inaction – are at issue.

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“Incontestably, alas,” James Baldwin wrote a few years after the killing of Martin Luther King Jr., while the war in Vietnam still raged, “most people are not, in action, worth very much; and yet, every human being is an unprecedented miracle. One tries to treat them as the miracles they are, while trying to protect oneself against the disasters they’ve become. This is not very different from the act of faith demanded by all those marches and petitions while Martin

was still alive. One could scarcely be deluded by Americans anymore, one scarcely dared expect anything from the great, vast, blank generality; and yet one was compelled to demand of Americans – and for their sakes, after all – a generosity, a clarity, and a nobility which they did not dream of demanding of themselves.... Perhaps, however, the moral of the story (and the hope of the world) lies in what one demands, not of others, but of oneself.”



22 AUGUST

Let's face it: The warfare state is part of us

THE USA'S military spending is now close to \$2 billion a day. This fall, the country will begin its seventh year of continuous war, with no end in sight. On the horizon is the very real threat of a massive air assault on Iran. And few in Congress seem willing or able to articulate a rejection of the warfare state.

While the Bush-Cheney administration is the most dangerous of our lifetimes – and ousting Republicans from the White House is imperative – such truths are apt to smooth the way for progressive evasions. We hear that “the people must take back the government,” but how can “the people” take back what they never really had? And when rhetoric calls for “returning to a foreign policy based on human rights and democracy,” we’re encouraged to be nostalgic for good old days that never existed.

The warfare state didn’t suddenly arrive in 2001, and it won’t disappear when the current lunatic in the Oval Office moves on.

Born 50 years before George W. Bush became president, I have always lived in a warfare state. Each man in the Oval Office has presided over an arsenal of weapons designed to destroy human life en masse. In recent decades, our self-proclaimed protectors have been able – and willing – to destroy all of humanity.

We’ve accommodated ourselves to this

insanity. And I do mean “we” – including those of us who fret aloud that the impact of our peace-loving wisdom is circumscribed because our voices don’t carry much farther than the choir. We may carry around an inflated sense of our own resistance to a system that is poised to incinerate and irradiate the planet.

Maybe it’s too unpleasant to acknowledge that we’ve been living in a warfare state for so long. And maybe it’s even more unpleasant to acknowledge that the warfare state is not just “out there.” It’s also internalized; at least to the extent that we pass up countless opportunities to resist it.

Like millions of other young Americans, I grew into awakening as the Vietnam War escalated. Slogans like “make love, not war” – and, a bit later, “the personal is political” – really spoke to us. But over the decades we generally learned, or relearned, to compartmentalize: as if personal and national histories weren’t interwoven in our pasts, presents and futures.

One day in 1969, a biologist named George Wald, who had won a Nobel Prize, visited the Massachusetts Institute of Technology – the biggest military contractor in academia – and gave a speech. “Our government has become preoccupied with death,” he said, “with the business of killing and being killed.”

That preoccupation has fluctuated, but in

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essence it has persisted. While speaking of a far-off war and a nuclear arsenal certain to remain in place after the war's end, Wald pointed out: "We are under repeated pressure to accept things that are presented to us as settled – decisions that have been made."

Today, in similar ways, our government is preoccupied and we are pressurized. The grisly commerce of killing – whether through carnage in Iraq and Afghanistan or through the deadly shredding of social safety-nets at home – thrives on aggressive war and on the perverse realpolitik of "national security" that brandishes the Pentagon's weaponry against the world. At least tacitly, we accept so much that threatens to destroy anything and everything.

As it happened, for reasons both "personal" and "political" – more accurately, for reasons indistinguishable between the two – my own life fell apart and began to re-assemble itself during the same season of 1969 when George Wald gave his speech, which he called "A Generation in Search of a Future."

Political and personal histories are usually kept separate – in how we're taught, how we speak and even how we think. But I've become very skeptical of the categories. They may not be much more than illusions we've been conned into going through the motions of believing.

We actually live in concentric spheres, and "politics" suffuses households as well as what Martin Luther King Jr. called "The World House." Under that heading, he wrote in 1967: "When scientific power outruns moral power, we end up with guided

missiles and misguided men. When we foolishly minimize the internal of our lives and maximize the external, we sign the warrant for our own day of doom. Our hope for creative living in this world house that we have inherited lies in our ability to re-establish the moral ends of our lives in personal character and social justice. Without this spiritual and moral reawakening we shall destroy ourselves in the misuse of our own instruments."

While trying to understand the essence of what so many Americans have witnessed over the last half century, I worked on a book (titled "Made Love, Got War") that sifts through the last 50 years of the warfare state... and, in the process, through my own life. I haven't learned as much as I would have liked, but some patterns emerged – persistent and pervasive since the middle of the 20th century.

The warfare state doesn't come and go. It can't be defeated on Election Day. Like it or not, it's at the core of the United States – and it has infiltrated our very being.

What we've tolerated has become part of us. What we accept, however reluctantly, seeps inward. In the long run, passivity can easily ratify even what we may condemn. And meanwhile, in the words of Thomas Merton, "It is the sane ones, the well-adapted ones, who can without qualms and without nausea aim the missiles and press the buttons that will initiate the great festival of destruction that they, the sane ones, have prepared."

The triumph of the warfare state degrades and suppresses us all. Even before the weapons perform as guaranteed.



6 SEPTEMBER 2007

Thomas Friedman: Hooked on war

READING HIS “Letter From Baghdad” column in the New York Times on Wednesday, you’d never know that Thomas Friedman has a history of enthusiasm for war. Now he laments that Iraq is bad for the United States – “everyone loves seeing us tied down here” – stuck in the “madness that is Iraq.” And he concludes that the good Americans who have been sent to Iraq will not be deserved by Iraqis “if they continue to hate each other more than they love their own kids.”

The column, under a Baghdad dateline, is boilerplate Friedman: sprinkled with I-am-here anecdotes and breezy geopolitical nostrums. For years now, the man widely touted as America’s most influential journalist has indicated that his patience with the war in Iraq might soon run out. But, like the media establishment he embodies, Friedman can’t bring himself to renounce a war that he helped to launch and then blessed as the incarnation of virtue.

On the last day of November 2003 – eight months after the invasion – Friedman gushed that “this war is the most important liberal, revolutionary U.S. democracy-building project since the Marshall Plan.” He lauded the Iraq war as “one of the noblest things this country has ever attempted abroad.”

But the assumptions built into a Fried-

man column are murky outside the context of his worldview. “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist,” Friedman wrote approvingly in one of his explaining-the-world bestsellers. “McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the U.S. Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.”

Those words appeared in Friedman’s book “The Lexus and the Olive Tree,” but the passage first surfaced (with a few tweaks of syntax) in the New York Times Magazine on March 28, 1999, near the end of a long piece adapted from the book. Filling almost the entire cover of the magazine was a red-white-and-blue fist, with the caption “What The World Needs Now” and a smaller-type explanation: “For globalism to work, America can’t be afraid to act like the almighty superpower that it is.”

The clenched graphic could be seen as the “hidden fist” that “the hidden hand of the market will never work without.” While the cover story’s patriotic fist was intended as a symbol of the globe’s need for multifaceted American power, the military facet had been unleashed just as the magazine went to press. By the time the star-spangled cover reached Sunday breakfast tables, NATO air attacks on Yugoslavia were underway; the

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U.S.-led bombing campaign would last for 78 straight days.

Writing columns and appearing on broadcast networks to assess the war, Tom Friedman was close to gleeful. (The man was widely viewed as a liberal, whatever that meant, and “the liberal media” provided Friedman with many platforms that often seemed to double as pedestals.) Interviewers at ABC, PBS and NPR ranged from deferential to fawning as they solicited his wisdom on the latest from Yugoslavia.

Even when he lamented the political constraints on the military options of the 19-member NATO alliance, Friedman was upbeat. “While there are many obvious downsides to war-from-15,000-feet,” he wrote after bombs had been falling for more than four weeks, “it does have one great strength – its sustainability. NATO can carry on this sort of air war for a long, long time. The Serbs need to remember that.”

So, Friedman explained, “if NATO’s only strength is that it can bomb forever, then it has to get every ounce out of that. Let’s at least have a real air war. The idea that people are still holding rock concerts in Belgrade, or going out for Sunday merry-go-round rides, while their fellow Serbs are ‘cleansing’ Kosovo, is outrageous. It should be lights out in Belgrade: every power grid, water pipe, bridge, road and war-related factory has to be targeted.”

He added: “Like it or not, we are at war with the Serbian nation (the Serbs certainly think so), and the stakes have to be very clear: Every week you ravage Kosovo is another decade we will set your country back by pulverizing you. You want 1950? We can do 1950. You want 1389? We can do 1389 too....”

The convenience marbled through such punditry is so routine that eyebrows rarely

go up. The chirpy line “Let’s at least have a real air war,” for instance, addressed American readers for whom, with rare exceptions, the “real air war” would be no more real than a media spectacle, with all the consequences falling on others very far away. As for rock concerts and merry-go-rounds, we could recall – if memory were to venture into unauthorized zones – that any number of such amusements went full throttle in the United States during the Vietnam War, and also for that matter during all subsequent U.S. wars including the one that Friedman was currently engaged in cheering on.

If the idea of civilians trying to continue with normal daily life while their government committed lethal crimes was “outrageous” enough to justify inflicting “a merciless air war” – as Friedman urged later in the same column – would someone have been justified in bombing the United States during its slaughter of countless innocents in Southeast Asia? Or during its active support for dictators and death squads in Latin America? For that matter, Friedman could hardly be unaware that for several weeks already American firepower had been maiming and killing Serb civilians, children included, with weaponry including cluster bombs. Today, Iraqi civilians keep dying from the U.S. war effort and other violence catalyzed by the occupation; meanwhile, of course, not a single concert or merry-go-round has stopped in the USA.

When righteousness moved Friedman to call for “lights out in Belgrade,” he was urging a war crime. The urban power grids and water pipes he yearned to see destroyed were essential to infants, the elderly, the frail and infirm inside places like hospitals and nursing homes. Targeting such grids and pipes would seem like barbarism to Ameri-

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cans if the missiles were incoming. Any ambiguity of the matter would probably be dispelled by a vow to keep bombing the country until it was set back 50 years or, if necessary, six centuries. But Friedman's enthusiasm was similar to that of many other prominent American commentators who also greeted the bombing of Yugoslavia with something close to exhilaration.

The final paragraph of Thomas Friedman's column in the New York Times on April 23, 1999, began with a punchy sentence: "Give war a chance." It was a witticism that seemed to delight Friedman. He repeated it, in print and on national television, as the bombing of Yugoslavia continued.

A tone of sadism could be discerned.



10 SEPTEMBER 2007

Six years of 9/11 as a licence to kill

IT **EVOKES** a tragedy that marks an epoch. From the outset, the warfare state has exploited “9/11,” a label at once too facile and too laden with historic weight – giving further power to the tacit political axiom that perception is reality.

Often it seems that media coverage is all about perception, especially when the underlying agendas are wired into huge profits and geopolitical leverage. If you associate a Big Mac or a Whopper with a happy meal or some other kind of great time, you’re more likely to buy it. If you connect 9/11 with a need for taking military action and curtailing civil liberties, you’re more likely to buy what the purveyors of war and authoritarian government have been selling for the past half-dozen years.

“Sept. 11 changed everything” became a sudden cliché in news media. Words are supposed to mean something, and those words were – and are – preposterous. They speak of a USA enthralled with itself while reducing the rest of the world (its oceans and valleys and mountains and peoples) to little more than an extensive mirror to help us reflect on our centrality to the world. In an individual, we call that narcissism. In the nexus of media and politics, all too often, it’s called “patriotism.”

What happened on Sept. 11, 2001, was extraordinary and horrible by any measure.

And certainly a crime against humanity. At the same time, it was a grisly addition to a history of human experience that has often included many thousands killed, en masse, by inhuman human choice. It is simply and complexly a factual matter that the U.S. government has participated in outright mass murders directly – in, for example, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Panama, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq – and less directly, through aid to armies terrorizing civilians in Nicaragua, Angola, East Timor and many other countries.

The news media claim to be providing context. But whose? Overall, the context of Uncle Sam in the more perverse and narcissistic aspects of his policy personality. The hypocrisies of claims about moral precepts and universal principles go beyond the mere insistence that some others “do as we say, not as we do.” What gets said, repeated and forgotten sets up kaleidoscope patterns that can be adjusted to serve the self-centered mega-institutions reliably fixated on maintaining their own dominance.

Media manifestations of these patterns are frequently a mess of contradictions so extreme that they can only be held together with the power of ownership, advertising and underwriting structures – along with notable assists from government agencies that dispense regulatory favors and myriad pressure to serve what might today be

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called a military-industrial-media complex. Our contact with the world is filtered through the mesh of mass media to such a great extent that the mesh itself becomes the fabric of power.

The most repetitious lessons of 9/11 – received and propagated by the vast preponderance of U.S. news media – have to do with the terribly asymmetrical importance of grief and of moral responsibility. Our nation is so righteous that we are trained to ask for whom the bell tolls. Rendered as im-

plicitly divisible, humanity is fractionated as seen through red-white-and-blue windows on the world.

Posing outside cycles of violence and victims who victimize, the dominant vision of Pax Americana has no more use now than it did six years ago for W.H. Auden’s observation: “Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return.”

We ought to know. But we Americans are too smart for that.

The U.S. media tell us so.



12 SEPTEMBER 2007

Here's the smell of the blood still

*The following essay is adapted from Norman Solomon's new book, **Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State**:*

WHEN MARTIN Luther King Jr. publicly referred to “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today – my own government,” he had no way of knowing that his description would ring so true 40 years later. As the autumn of 2007 begins, the reality of Uncle Sam as an unhinged mega-killer haunts a large minority of Americans. Many who can remember the horrific era of the Vietnam War are nearly incredulous that we could now be living in a time of similarly deranged official policy.

Despite all the differences, the deep parallels between the two war efforts inform us that the basic madness of entrenched power in our midst is not about miscalculations or bad management or quagmires. The continuity tells us much more than we would probably like to know about the obstacles to decency that confront us every day.

The incredulity and numbing, the frequent bobbing-and-weaving of our own consciousness, the hollow comforts of passivity, insulate us from hard truths and harsher realities than we might ever have expected to need to confront – about our

country and about ourselves.

Of all the words spewed from the Pet Crock hearings with General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, maybe none were more revealing than Petraeus's bid for a modicum of sympathy for his burdens as a commander. “This is going on three years for me, on top of a year deployment to Bosnia as well,” he said at the Senate hearing, “so my family also knows something about sacrifice.”

There's sacrifice and sacrifice.

“It is as bad as it seems,” longtime activist Dave Dellinger told a gathering of protesters outside the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami Beach as it prepared to re-nominate a war-criminal president. “We must achieve a breakthrough in understanding reality.”

I listened, agreeing. But it was, and is, easier said. How do we truly grasp what's being done in our names, with our tax dollars – and, most of all, with our inordinate self-restraint that tolerates what should be intolerable?

From an Oval Office tape, May 4, 1972: “I'll see that the United States does not lose,” the president said while conferring with aides Al Haig, John Connally and Henry Kissinger. “I'm putting it quite bluntly. I'll be quite precise. South Vietnam may lose. But

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the United States cannot lose. Which means, basically, I have made the decision. Whatever happens to South Vietnam, we are going to cream North Vietnam... For once, we've got to use the maximum power of this country ... against this shit-ass little country: to win the war. We can't use the word, 'win.' But others can."

By mid-1972, U.S. troop levels in Vietnam were way down – to around seventy thousand – almost half a million lower than three years earlier. Fewer Americans were dying, and the carnage in Vietnam was fading as a front-burner issue in U.S. politics. Nixon's withdrawal strategy had changed the focus of media coverage.

The executive producer of ABC's evening news, Av Westin, had written in a 1969 memo: "I have asked our Vietnam staff to alter the focus of their coverage from combat pieces to interpretive ones, pegged to the eventual pull-out of the American forces. This point should be stressed for all hands." In a telex to the network's Saigon bureau, Westin gave the news of his decree to the correspondents: "I think the time has come to shift some of our focus from the battlefield, or more specifically American military involvement with the enemy, to themes and stories under the general heading 'We Are on Our Way Out of Vietnam.'"

The killing had gone more technological; from 1969 to 1972 the U.S. government dropped 3.5 million tons of bombs on Vietnam, a total higher than all the bombing in the previous five years. The combination of withdrawing U.S. troops and stepping up the bombardment was anything but a coincidence; the latest in military science would make it possible to, in President Nixon's private words, "use the maximum power of this country" against a "shit-ass little country."

In December 1972, Nixon delivered on his confidential pledge to "cream North Vietnam," ordering eleven days and nights of almost round-the-clock sorties (Christmas was an off day) that dropped twenty thousand tons of bombs on North Vietnam. B-52s reached the city of Hanoi. During that week and a half, Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg later noted, the U.S. government dropped "the explosive equivalent of the Nagasaki A-bomb."

Visiting Baghdad near the end of 2002, I looked at Iraqi people and wondered what would happen to them when the missiles arrived, what would befall the earnest young man managing the little online computer shop in the hotel next to the alcohol-free bar, who invited me to a worship service at the Presbyterian church that he devoutly attended; or the sweet-faced middle-aged fellow with a moustache very much like Saddam Hussein's (a ubiquitous police-state fashion statement) who stood near the elevator and put hand over heart whenever I passed; or the sweethearts chatting across candles at an outdoor restaurant as twilight settled on the banks of the Tigris.

That winter, movers and shakers in Washington shuffled along to the beat of a media drum that kept reporting on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as a virtual certainty. At the same time, millions of Americans tried to prevent an invasion; their activism ranged from letters and petitions to picket lines, civil disobedience, marches, and mass rallies. On January 18, 2003, as the Washington Post recalled years later, "an antiwar protest described as the largest since the Vietnam War drew several hundred thousand ... on

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the eve of the Iraq war, in subfreezing Washington weather. The high temperature reported that day was in the mid-20s.”

The outcry was global, and the numbers grew larger. On February 15, an estimated 10 million people demonstrated against the impending war. A dispatch from Knight-Ridder news service summed up the events of that day: “By the millions, peace marchers in cities around the world united Saturday behind a single demand: No war with Iraq.” But the war planners running the U.S. government were determined.

During one year after another, the warfare intensified in Iraq. And an air war kept escalating. The U.S. media assumed that almost any use of American air power was to the good. (Exceptions came with fleeting news of mishaps like dropping bombs on wedding parties.) What actually happened to human beings every day as explosives hit the ground would not be conveyed to the reputedly well-informed. What we didn’t know presumably wouldn’t hurt us or our self-image. We thought ourselves better – incomparably better – because we burned people with modern technology from high in the air. Car bombs and detonation belts were for the uncivilized.

One of the methodical quirks of U.S. Air Force news releases has been that they consistently refer to insurgents as “anti-Iraqi forces” – even though almost all of those fighters are Iraqis. So, in a release about activities on Christmas Day 2006, the Air Force reported that “Marine Corps F/A-18Ds conducted a strike against anti-Iraqi forces near Haqlaniyah.” The next day, it was the same story, as it would be for a long time to come – with U.S. Air Force jets bombing “anti-Iraqi forces” on behalf of missions for “Op-

eration Iraqi Freedom” in order to “deter and disrupt terrorist activities.”

In my kitchen is a dark-red little carpet with black designs, imported from Baghdad. I bought it there one afternoon in late January 2003 at the bazaar (not so different, to my eyes anyway, from the market I later visited in Tehran). My traveling companion was a former high-ranking U.N. official, Denis Halliday, who had lived in Baghdad for a while during the 1990s before resigning as head of the “oil for food” program in protest against the draconian sanctions that caused so much devastation among civilians. Denis was revisiting some of the shopkeepers he had come to know. After warm greetings and pleasantries, an Iraqi man in his middle years said that he’d heard on the BBC about a French proposal for averting an invasion. The earnest hope in his voice made my heart sink, as if falling into the dirty stretch of the Tigris River that Denis and I had just hopped a boat across, where people were beating rugs on stones alongside the banks.

Often when I look at the carpet in the kitchen I think that it is filled with blood, remembering how one country’s treasures become another’s aesthetic enhancements. I had carted home the rolled-up carpet and less than two months later came “shock and awe.”

Now, more than four years afterward, the daily papers piled up on the breakfast table a few feet away tell of the latest carnage. I don’t think the rug has ever given me pleasure since the day it unfurled across the hardwood floor. It hasn’t been cleaned since presumably it soaked up the Tigris water during its last washing. There’s blood on the carpet and no amount of trips to the dry

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cleaners could change that.

Macbeth, Act V, Scene 1: “Out, damned spot! out, I say! ... What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? – Yet who would have thought the

old man to have had so much blood in him?

... What, will these hands ne'er be clean?

... Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.”



1 OCTOBER 2007

Political ‘science’ and the truth of consequences

*This article is excerpted from Norman Solomon’s new book **Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America’s Warfare State***

CONTEMPT FOR the empirical that can’t be readily jiggered or spun is evident at the top of the executive branch in Washington. The country is mired in a discourse that echoes the Scopes trial dramatized in “Inherit the Wind.” Mere rationality would mean lining up on the side of “science” against the modern yahoos and political panderers waving the flag of social conservatism. (At the same time that scientific Darwinism is under renewed assault, a de facto alliance between religious fundamentalists and profit-devout corporatists has moved the country further into social Darwinism that aims to disassemble the welfare state.) Entrenched opposition to stem-cell research is part of a grim pattern that includes complacency about severe pollution and global warming – disastrous trends already dragging one species after another to the brink of extinction and beyond.

Disdain for “science” is cause for political concern. Yet few Americans and no major political forces are “antiscience” across the board. The ongoing prerogative is to pick and choose. Those concerned about the ravages left by scientific civilization – the com-

bustion engine, chemicals, fossil-fuel plants, and so much more – frequently look to science for evidence and solutions. Those least concerned about the Earth’s ecology are apt to be the greatest enthusiasts for science in the service of unfettered commerce or the Pentagon, which always seeks the most effectively “advanced” scientific know-how. Even the most avowedly faithful are not inclined to leave the implementation of His plan to unscientific chance.

So, depending on the circumstances, right-wing fundamentalists could support the use of the latest science for top-of-the-line surveillance, for command and control, and for overall warfare – or could dismiss unwelcome scientific evidence of environmental harm as ideologically driven conclusions that should not be allowed to interfere with divinely inspired policies. Those kinds of maneuvers, George Orwell wrote in “1984,” help the believers “to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies.”

In the first years of the twenty-first century, the liberal script hailed science as an urgent antidote to Bush-like irrationality. That was logical. But it was also ironic and ultimately unpersuasive. Pure allegiance to

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science exists least of all in the political domain; scientific findings are usually filtered by power, self-interest, and ideology. For instance, the technical and ecological advantages of mass transit have long been clear; yet foremost engineering minds are deployed to the task of building better SUVs. And there has never been any question that nuclear weapons are bad for the Earth and the future of humanity, but no one ever condemns the continuing development of nuclear weapons as a bipartisan assault on science. On the contrary, the nonstop R & D efforts for thermonuclear weapons are all about science.

When scientists found rapid climate change to be both extremely ominous and attributable to the proliferation of certain technologies, the media and political power centers responded to the data by doing as they wished. The GOP's assault on science was cause for huge alarm when applied to the matter of global warming, but the unchallenged across-the-aisle embrace of science in the weaponry field had never been benign. When it came to designing and manufacturing the latest doomsday devices, only the most rigorous scientists need apply. And no room would be left for "intelligent design" as per the will of God.

The neutrality of science was self-evident and illusory. Science was impartial because its discoveries were verifiable and accurate – but science was also, through funding and government direction, largely held captive. Its massively destructive capabilities were often seen as stupendous assets. In the case of ultramodern American armaments, the worse they got the better they got. Whatever could be said about "the market," it was skewed by the buyers; the Pentagon's routine spending made the nation's budget for alternative fuels or eco-

friendly technologies look like a pittance.

We're social beings, as evolution seems to substantiate. Blessings and curses revolve largely around the loving and the warlike, the nurturing and the predatory. We're self-protective for survival, yet we also have "conscience" – what Darwin described as the characteristic that most distinguishes human beings from other animals. Given the strength of our instincts for individual and small-group survival, we seem to be stingy with more far-reaching conscience.

Our capacities to take humane action are as distinctive of our species as conscience, and no more truly reliable. As people, we are consequences and we also cause them: by what we choose to do and not do. The beneficiaries of economic and military savagery are far from the combat zones. In annual reports, the Pentagon's prime contractors give an overview of the vast financial rewards for shrewdly making a killing. To surrender the political battlefield to such forces is to self-marginalize and leave more space for those who thrive on plunder.

The inseparable bond of life and death should be healthy antipathy.

We've had no way of really knowing how near annihilation might be. But our lives have flashed with scarcely believable human-made lightning – the evidence of things truly obscene, of officialdom gone mad – photos and footage of mushroom clouds, and routinely set-aside descriptions starting with Hiroshima. Waiting on the nuclear thunder.

Five decades after Sputnik, such apocalyptic dangers are still present, but from Americans in my generation the most articulated fears have to do with running out of money before breath. The USA is certainly

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no place to be old, sick, and low on funds. Huge medical bills and hazards of second-class care loom ahead. For people whose childhoods fell between victory over Japan and evacuation from Saigon, the twenty-first century has brought the time-honored and perfectly understandable quest to avoid dying before necessary – and to avoid living final years or seeing loved ones living final years in misery. Under such circumstances, self obsession may seem unavoidable.

There must be better options. But they're apt to be obscured, most of all, by our own over-scheduled passivity; by who we figure we are, who we've allowed ourselves to become. The very word "options" is likely to have a consumer ring to it (extras on a new car, clauses in a contract). We buy in and consume, mostly selecting from prefab choices – even though, looking back, the best of life's changes have usually come from creating options instead of choosing from the ones in stock.

When, in 1969, biologist George Wald said that "we are under repeated pressure to accept things that are presented to us as settled – decisions that have been made," the comment had everything to do with his observation that "our government has become preoccupied with death, with the business of killing and being killed." The curtailing of our own sense of real options is a concentric process, encircling our personal lives and our

sense of community, national purpose, and global possibilities; circumscribing the ways that we, and the world around us, might change. Four decades after Wald's anguished speech "A Generation in Search of a Future," many of the accepted "facts of life" are still "facts of death" – blotting out horizons, stunting imaginations, holding tongues, limiting capacities to nurture or defend life. We are still in search of a future.

And we're brought up short by the precious presence and unspeakable absence of love. "All of us know, whether or not we are able to admit it, that mirrors can only lie," James Baldwin wrote, "that death by drowning is all that awaits one there. It is for this reason that love is so desperately sought and so cunningly avoided. Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within." This love exists "not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth."

The freezing of love into small spaces, part of the numbing of America, proceeds in tandem with the warfare state. It's easier to not feel others' pain when we can't feel too much ourselves.

If we want a future that sustains life, we'd better create it ourselves.



4 OCTOBER 2007

Sputnik 50 years later: The launch of techno-power

*This is an excerpt from Norman Solomon's new book **Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State***

A **STORY COULD** start almost anywhere. This one begins at a moment startled by a rocket. In the autumn of 1957, America was not at war ... or at peace. The threat of nuclear annihilation shadowed every day, flickering with visions of the apocalyptic. In classrooms, "duck and cover" drills were part of the curricula. Underneath any Norman Rockwell painting, the grim reaper had attained the power of an ultimate monster.

Dwight Eisenhower was most of the way through his fifth year in the White House. He liked to speak reassuring words of patriotic faith, with presidential statements like: "America is the greatest force that God has ever allowed to exist on His footstool." Such pronouncements drew a sharp distinction between the United States and the Godless Communist foe.

But on October 4, 1957, the Kremlin announced the launch of Sputnik, the world's first satellite. God was supposed to be on America's side, yet the Soviet atheists had gotten to the heavens before us. Suddenly the eagle of liberty could not fly nearly so high.

Sputnik was instantly fascinating and alarming. The American press swooned at

the scientific vistas and shuddered at the military implications. Under the headline "Red Moon Over the U.S.," Time quickly explained that "a new era in history had begun, opening a bright new chapter in mankind's conquest of the natural environment and a grim new chapter in the cold war." The newsmagazine was glum about the space rivalry: "The U.S. had lost its lead because, in spreading its resources too thin, the nation had skimmed too much on military research and development."

The White House tried to project calm; Eisenhower said the satellite "does not raise my apprehension, not one iota." But many on the political spectrum heard Sputnik's radio pulse as an ominous taunt.

A heroine of the Republican right, Clare Boothe Luce, said the satellite's beeping was an "outer-space raspberry to a decade of American pretensions that the American way of life was a gilt-edged guarantee of our material superiority." Newspaper readers learned that Stuart Symington, a Democratic senator who'd been the first secretary of the air force, "said the Russians will be able to launch mass attacks against the United States with intercontinental ballistic missiles within two or three years."

A New York Times article matter-of-factly referred to "the mild panic that has seized most of the nation since Russia's sputnik was launched two weeks ago." In

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another story, looking forward, Times science reporter William L. Laurence called for bigger pots of gold at the end of scientific rainbows: “In a free society such as ours it is not possible ‘to channel human efforts’ without the individual’s consent and whole-hearted willingness. To attract able and promising young men and women into the fields of science and engineering it is necessary first to offer them better inducements than are presently offered.”

At last, in early February 1958, an American satellite – the thirty-pound Explorer – went into orbit. What had succeeded in powering it into space was a military rocket, developed by a U.S. Army research team. The head of that team, the rocket scientist Wernher von Braun, was boosting the red-white-and-blue after the fall of his ex-employer, the Third Reich. In March 1958 he publicly warned that the U.S. space program was a few years behind the Russians.

Soon after dusk, while turning a skate key or playing with a hula hoop, children might look up to see if they could spot the bright light of a satellite arching across the sky. But they could not see the fallout from nuclear bomb tests, underway for a dozen years by 1958. The conventional wisdom, reinforced by the press, downplayed fears while trusting the authorities; basic judgments about the latest weapons programs were to be left to the political leaders and their designated experts.

On the weekly prime-time Walt Disney television show, an animated fairy with a magic wand urged youngsters to drink three glasses of milk each day. But airborne strontium-90 from nuclear tests was falling on pastures all over, migrating to cows and then to the milk supply and, finally, to peo-

ple’s bones. Radioactive isotopes from fallout were becoming inseparable from the human diet.

Young people – dubbed “baby boomers,” a phrase that both dramatized and trivialized them – were especially vulnerable to strontium-90 as their fast-growing bones absorbed the radioactive isotope along with calcium. The children who did as they were told by drinking plenty of milk ended up heightening the risks – not unlike their parents, who were essentially told to accept the bomb fallout without complaint.

Under the snappy rubric of “the nuclear age,” the white-coated and loyal American scientist stood as an icon, revered as surely as the scientists of the enemy were assumed to be pernicious. And yet the mutual fallout, infiltrating dairy farms and mothers’ breast milk and the bones of children, was a type of subversion that never preoccupied J. Edgar Hoover.

The more that work by expert scientists endangered us, the more we were informed that we needed those scientists to save us. Who better to protect Americans from the hazards of the nuclear industry and the terrifying potential of nuclear weapons than the best scientific minds serving the industry and developing the weapons?

In June 1957 – the same month Nobel Prize-winning chemist Linus Pauling published an article estimating that ten thousand cases of leukemia had already occurred due to U.S. and Soviet nuclear testing – President Eisenhower proclaimed that the American detonations would result in nuclear warheads with much less radioactivity. Ike said that “we have reduced fallout from bombs by nine-tenths,” and he pledged that the Nevada explosions would continue in order to “see how clean we can make them.” The president spoke just after

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meeting with Edward Teller and other high-powered physicists. Eisenhower assured the country that the scientists and the U.S. nuclear test operations were working on the public's behalf. "They say: 'Give us four or five more years to test each step of our development and we will produce an absolutely clean bomb.'"

But sheer atomic fantasy, however convenient, was wearing thin. Many scientists actually opposed the aboveground nuclear blasts. Relying on dissenters with a range of technical expertise, Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson had made an issue of fall-out in the 1956 presidential campaign. During 1957 – a year when the U.S. government set off thirty-two nuclear bombs over southern Nevada and the Pacific – Pauling spearheaded a global petition drive against nuclear testing; by January 1958 more than eleven thousand scientists in fifty countries had signed.

Clearly, the views and activities of scientists ran the gamut. But Washington was pumping billions of tax dollars into massive vehicles for scientific research. These huge federal outlays were imposing military priorities on American scientists without any need for a blatant government decree.

What was being suppressed might suddenly pop up like some kind of jack-in-the-box. Righteous pressure against disruptive or "un-American" threats was internal and also global, with a foreign policy based on containment. Control of space, inner and outer, was pivotal. What could not be controlled was liable to be condemned.

The '50s and early '60s are now commonly derided as unbearably rigid, but much in the era was new and stylish at the time. Suburbs boomed along with babies.

Modern household gadgets and snazzier cars appeared with great commercial fanfare while millions of families, with a leg up from the GI Bill, climbed into some part of the vaguely defined middle class. The fresh and exciting technology called television did much to turn suburbia into the stuff of white-bread legends – with scant use for the less-sightly difficulties of the near-poor and destitute living in ghettos or rural areas where the TV lights didn't shine.

On the surface, most kids lived in a placid time, while small screens showed entertaining images of sanitized life. One among many archetypes came from Betty Crocker cake-mix commercials, which were all over the tube; the close-ups of the icing could seem remarkable, even in black and white. Little girls who had toy ovens with little cake-mix boxes could make miniature layer cakes.

Every weekday from 1955 to 1965 the humdrum pathos of women known as housewives could be seen on *Queen for a Day*. The climax of each episode came as one of the competitors, often sobbing, stood with a magnificent bouquet of roses suddenly in her arms, overcome with joy. Splendid gifts of brand-new refrigerators and other consumer products, maybe even mink stoles, would elevate bleak lives into a stratosphere that America truly had to offer. The show pitted women's sufferings against each other; victory would be the just reward for the best, which was to say the worst, predicament. The final verdict came in the form of applause from the studio audience, measured by an on-screen meter that jumped with the decibels of apparent empathy and commiseration, one winner per program. Solutions were individual. *Queen for a Day* was a nationally televised ritual of charity, providing selective testimony to the

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goodness of society. Virtuous grief, if heartrending enough, could summon prizes, and the ecstatic weeping of a crowned recipient was vicarious pleasure for viewers across the country, who could see clearly America's bounty and generosity.

That televised spectacle was not entirely fathomable to the baby-boom generation, which found more instructive role-modeling from such media fare as *The Adventures of Spin and Marty* and *Annette Funicello* and other aspects of the *Mickey Mouse Club* show – far more profoundly prescriptive than descriptive. By example and inference, we learned how kids were supposed to be, and our being more that way made the media images seem more natural and realistic. It was a spiral of self-mystification, with the authoritative versions of childhood green-lighted by network executives, producers, and sponsors. Likewise with the sitcoms, which drew kids into a Potemkin refuge from whatever home life they experienced on the near side of the TV screen.

Dad was apt to be emotionally aloof in real life, but on television the daddies were endearingly quirky, occasionally stern, essentially lovable, and even mildly loving. Despite the canned laugh tracks, for kids this could be very serious – a substitute world with obvious advantages over the starker one around them. The chances of their parents measuring up to the moms and dads on *Ozzie and Harriet* or *Father Knows Best* were remote. As were, often, the real parents. Or at least they seemed real. Sometimes.

Father Knows Best aired on network television for almost ten years. The first episodes gained little momentum in 1954, but within a couple of years the show was one of the nation's leading prime-time psychodramas. It gave off warmth that simu-

lated intimacy; for children at a huge demographic bulge, maybe no TV program was more influential as a family prototype.

But seventeen years after the shooting stopped, the actor who had played Bud, the only son on *Father Knows Best*, expressed remorse. "I'm ashamed I had any part of it," Billy Gray said. "People felt warmly about the show and that show did everybody a disservice." Gray had come to see the program as deceptive. "I felt that the show purported to be real life, and it wasn't. I regret that it was ever presented as a model to live by." And he added: "I think we were all well motivated but what we did was run a hoax. We weren't trying to, but that is what it was. Just a hoax."

I went to the John Glenn parade in downtown Washington on February 26, 1962, a week after he'd become the first American to circle the globe in a space capsule. Glenn was a certified hero, and my school deemed the parade a valid excuse for an absence. To me, a fifth grader, that seemed like a good deal even when the weather turned out to be cold and rainy.

For the new and dazzling space age, America's astronauts served as valiant explorers who added to the elan of the Camelot mythos around the presidential family. The Kennedys were sexy, exciting, modern aristocrats who relied on deft word-smiths to produce throbbing eloquent speeches about freedom and democracy. The bearing was American regal, melding the appeal of refined nobility and touch football. The media image was damn-near storybook. Few Americans, and very few young people of the era, were aware of the actual roles of JFK's vaunted new "special forces" dispatched to the Third World,

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where – below the media radar – they targeted labor-union organizers and other assorted foes of U.S.-backed oligarchies.

But a confrontation with the Soviet Union materialized that could not be ignored. Eight months after the Glenn parade, in tandem with Nikita Khrushchev, the president dragged the world to a nuclear precipice. In late October 1962, Kennedy went on national television and denounced “the Soviet military buildup on the island of Cuba,” asserting that “a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island.” Speaking from the White House, the president said: “We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth – but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced.”

Early in the next autumn, President Kennedy signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty, which sent nuclear detonations underground. The treaty was an important public health measure against radioactive fallout. Meanwhile, the banishment of mushroom clouds made superpower preparations for blowing up the world less visible. The new limits did nothing to interfere with further development of nuclear arsenals.

Kennedy liked to talk about vigor, and he epitomized it. Younger than Eisenhower by a full generation, witty, with a suave wife and two adorable kids, he was leading the way to open vistas. Store windows near

Pennsylvania Avenue displayed souvenir plates and other Washington knickknacks that depicted the First Family – standard tourist paraphernalia, yet with a lot more pizzazz than what Dwight and Mamie had generated.

A few years after the Glenn parade, when I passed the same storefront windows along blocks just east of the White House, the JFK glamour had gone dusty, as if suspended in time, facing backward. I thought of a scene from *Great Expectations*. The Kennedy era already seemed like the room where Miss Havisham’s wedding cake had turned to ghastly cobwebs; in Dickens’ words, “as if a feast had been in preparation when the house and the clocks all stopped together.”

The clocks all seemed to stop together on the afternoon of November 22, 1963. But after the assassination, the gist of the reputed best-and-brightest remained in top Cabinet positions.

The distance from Dallas to the Gulf of Tonkin was scarcely eight months as the calendar flew. And soon America’s awesome scientific capabilities were trained on a country where guerrilla fighters walked on the soles of sandals cut from old rubber tires.

Growing up in a mass-marketed culture of hoax, the baby-boom generation came of age in a warfare state. From Vietnam to Iraq, that state was to wield its technological power with crazed dedication to massive violence.



7 OCTOBER 2007

When science and weapons meet

WHEN THE Soviet Union launched the world's first artificial satellite on Oct. 4, 1957, American horizons darkened with self-reproach and fear. Sputnik was a shock to the system. "The fact that we have lost the race to launch the satellite means that we are losing the race to produce ballistic missiles," the influential columnist Walter Lippmann wrote. At a diplomatic party, when an official in the Eisenhower administration commented that Sputnik would be forgotten in six months, Washington's famed hostess-with-the-mostest Perle Mesta shot back: "And in six months, we may all be dead."

Yet we all know the fabled story line: A resilient America rose to the challenge and bested the Soviets in space. A dozen years after its propaganda perigee, the United States landed a man on the moon. And the nation's zeal for technology continues to shape the American experience.

But the triumphant story line bypasses a shadowy continuum of the last five decades.

Sometimes even authorities voiced misgivings. At the end of a presidency that proudly developed the latest doomsday weaponry, Dwight Eisenhower delivered a farewell address that warned against a "military-industrial complex." Less famously, in the same speech, he also warned that "public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite."

In a 1967 speech, Martin Luther King Jr. aptly described a society going off-course: "When scientific power outruns moral power, we end up with guided missiles and misguided men." The U.S. war effort in Vietnam was making the most of new computer technology – on behalf of policy priorities that fueled a backlash from many in the baby-boom generation. Millions of young Americans began to view their elders as depraved and their upbringings as hollow. The poses of objectivity and science-based wisdom were losing their appeal for many who began to look at the customary straight-and-narrow path as a grim forced march.

The two most memorable accomplishments of the 1960s for American aerospace were the moonwalk and the high-tech bombing that managed to decimate vast expanses of Southeast Asia. From 238,000 miles away or a few thousand feet above the ground, Uncle Sam's dominance of space and air was dazzling. The same patriotic persona taking a giant step for mankind on the moon was calling in nonstop air strikes on planet Earth.

But during the same decade, the preoccupations of more and more Baby Boomers ran directly counter to the emphasis that had shifted the U.S. space program into overdrive. Society's crash course on a science trajectory was about learning and training to think in ways that would boost the quest for new technologies. In contrast, a lot of the

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emerging counterculture had to do with efforts to open doors of perception – feeling instead of just calculating – discovering and not just trying to solve intellectual puzzles.

Yet the dominant American responses to Sputnik had impacts that propelled a “scientific-technological elite” to new heights of power. Technology was harnessed to a political economy that pulled the talents and even the dreams of new generations toward intense digital consumerism and acquiescence to the warfare state.

Sputnik accelerated a process that was already well under way 50 years ago. Schools were to produce America’s intellectual pistons for the space race and the broader arms race. As the atomic physicist Philip Morrison had predicted in 1946, federal largesse would deftly hook the nation’s colleges into active compliance. “The now amicable contracts will tighten up and the fine print will start to contain talk about results and specific weapon problems,” he said. “And science itself will have been bought by war on the installment plan.”

Today, no educational institution more symbolizes the magnitude of that moral corruption than the University of California. The UC system continues to provide key management functions – serving as a prestigious air-freshener for the stench of annihilation technology – at the Livermore and Los Alamos nuclear weapons laboratories.

In the first years of the 21st century, a liberal script has hailed science as an urgent antidote to the irrationality of the Bush administration. Such faith in science may be logical, but it is also ironic and ultimately unpersuasive. Pure allegiance to scientific truth has existed least of all in political domains, where pivotal findings are routinely filtered by power, self-interest and ideology.

For instance, the technical and ecological advantages of mass transit have long been clear; yet foremost engineering minds are deployed to the task of building better SUVs. And there has never been any question that nuclear weapons are bad for the Earth and the human future, but no one ever condemns the continuing development of nuclear weapons as a bipartisan assault on science. On the contrary, America’s non-stop R&D efforts for thermonuclear weapons are all about science.

The Republican assault on science is cause for alarm when applied to the matter of global warming. But carrying a liberal torch for “science,” currently in fervent vogue, leaves unchallenged the across-the-aisle embrace of scientific pursuits in the weaponry field that have never been benign. When it comes to designing and manufacturing the latest devices of mass destruction, only the most rigorous science need apply.

In practice, the value of science remains self-evident and ambiguous. Science is impartial because its discoveries are verifiable and accurate – but science is also, through funding and government direction, largely held captive. Its destructive capabilities are often seen as stupendous assets. In the case of ultramodern American armaments, the worse they get, the better they get.

Fifty years after Sputnik, the American love affair with cutting-edge technology has never been more torrid. Everyday digital achievements are so fantastic that they fill our horizons and often seem to define our futures. The emphasis on speed, convenience and technical capacity keeps us fixated on the latest new frontiers. But technology cannot help with the most distinctly human and vital of endeavors – deciding what we truly care about most.

16 OCTOBER 2007

The pro-war undertow of the Blackwater scandal

THE BLACKWATER scandal has gotten plenty of media coverage, and it deserves a lot more. Taxpayer subsidies for private mercenaries are antithetical to democracy, and Blackwater's actions in Iraq have often been murderous. But the scandal is unfolding in a U.S. media context that routinely turns criticisms of the war into demands for a better war.

Many politicians are aiding this alchemy. Rhetoric from a House committee early this month audibly yearned for a better war at a highly publicized hearing that featured Erik Prince, the odious CEO of Blackwater USA.

A congressman from New Hampshire, Paul Hodes, insisted on the importance of knowing "whether failures to hold Blackwater personnel accountable for misconduct undermine our efforts in Iraq." Another Democrat on the panel, Carolyn Maloney of New York, told Blackwater's top exec that "your actions may be undermining our mission in Iraq and really hurting the relationship and trust between the Iraqi people and the American military."

But the problem with Blackwater's activities is not that they "undermine" the U.S. military's "efforts" and "mission" in Iraq. The efforts and the mission shouldn't exist.

A real hazard of preoccupations with Blackwater is that it will become a scapegoat for what is profoundly and fundamen-

tally wrong with the U.S. effort and mission. Condemnation of Blackwater, however justified, can easily be syphoned into a political whirlpool that demands a cleanup of the U.S. war effort – as though a relentless war of occupation based on lies could be redeemed by better management – as if the occupying troops in Army and Marine uniforms are incarnations of restraint and accountability.

Midway through this month, the Associated Press reported that "U.S. and Iraqi officials are negotiating Baghdad's demand that security company Blackwater USA be expelled from the country within six months, and American diplomats appear to be working on how to fill the security gap if the company is phased out." We can expect many such stories in the months ahead.

Meanwhile, we get extremely selective U.S. media coverage of key Pentagon operations. Bombs explode in remote areas, launched from high-tech U.S. weaponry, and few who scour the American news pages and broadcasts are any the wiser about the human toll.

With all the media attention to sectarian violence in Iraq, the favorite motif of coverage is the suicide bombing that underscores the conflagration as Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence. American reporters and commentators rarely touch on the U.S. occupation as perpetrator and catalyst of the carnage.

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One of the most unusual aspects of the current Blackwater scandal is that it places recent killings of Iraqi civilians front-and-center even though the killers were Americans. This angle is outside the customary media frame that focuses on what Iraqis are doing to each other and presents Americans – whether in military uniform or in contractor mode – as well-meaning heroes who sometimes become victims of dire circumstances.

Many members of Congress, like quite a few journalists, have hopped on the anti-Blackwater bandwagon with rhetoric that bemoans how the company is making it more difficult for the U.S. government to succeed in Iraq. But the American war effort has continued to deepen the horrors inside that country. And Washington's priorities have clearly placed the value of oil way above the value of human life. So why should we want the U.S. government to succeed in Iraq?

Unless the deadly arrogance of Blackwa-

ter and its financiers in the U.S. government is placed in a broader perspective on the U.S. war effort as a whole, the vilification of the firm could distract from challenging the overall presence of American forces in Iraq and the air war that continues to escalate outside the American media's viewfinder.

The current Blackwater scandal should help us to understand the dynamics that routinely set in when occupiers – whether privatized mercenaries or uniformed soldiers – rely on massive violence against the population they claim to be helping.

Terrible as Blackwater has been and continues to be, that profiteering corporation should not be made a lightning rod for opposition to the war. New legislation that demands accountability from private security forces can't make a war that's wrong any more right. Finding better poster boys who can be touted as humanitarians rather than mercenaries won't change the basic roles of gun-toting Americans in a country that they have no right to occupy.



18 OCTOBER 2007

The United States of Violence

*This article is adapted from Norman Solomon's new book **Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State***

WE KEEP hearing that Iraq is not Vietnam. And surely any competent geographer would agree. But the United States is the United States – still a country run by leaders who brandish, celebrate and use the massive violent capabilities of the Pentagon as a matter of course.

Almost fifty years ago, during the same autumn JFK won the presidency, John Hersey came out with “The Child Buyer,” a novel written in the form of a hearing before a state senate committee. “Excuse me, Mrs., but I wonder if you know what’s at stake in this situation,” a senator says to the mother of a ten-year-old genius being sought for purchase by the United Lymphomiloid corporation. “You realize the national defense is involved here.”

“This is my boy,” the mom replies. “This is my beautiful boy they want to take away from me.”

A vice president of United Lymphomiloid, “in charge of materials procurement,” testifies that “my duties have an extremely high national-defense rating.” He adds:

“When a commodity that you need falls in short supply, you have to get out and hustle. I buy brains. About eighteen months ago my company, United Lymphomiloid of America, Incorporated, was faced with an extremely difficult problem, a project, a long-range government contract, fifty years, highly specialized and top secret, and we needed some of the best minds in the country...”

Soon, most of the lawmakers on the committee are impressed with the importance of the proposed purchase for the nation. So there’s some consternation when the child buyer reports that he finally laid his proposition “squarely on the table” – and the boy’s answer was no.

Senator Skypack exclaims: “What the devil, couldn’t you go over his head and just buy him?”

“The Child Buyer” is a clever send-up, with humor far from lighthearted. Fifteen years after Hersey did firsthand research for his book “Hiroshima,” the Cold War had America by the throat. The child buyer (whose name, as if anticipating a Bob Dylan song not to be written for several more years, is Mr. Jones) tells the senate panel that his quest is urgent, despite the fifty-year duration of the project. “As you know, we live in a cutthroat world,” he says. “What appears as sweetness and light in your com-

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mon television commercial of a consumer product often masks a background of ruthless competitive infighting. The gift-wrapped brickbat. Polite legal belly-slitting. Banditry dressed in a tux. The more so with projects like ours. A prospect of perfectly enormous profits is involved here. We don't intend to lose out."

And what is the project for which the child will be bought? A memorandum, released into the hearing record, details "the methods used by United Lymphomiloid to eliminate all conflict from the inner lives of the purchased specimens and to ensure their utilization of their innate equipment at maximum efficiency."

First comes solitary confinement for a period of weeks in "the Forgetting Chamber." A second phase, called "Education and Desensitization in Isolation," moves the process forward. Then comes a "Data-feeding Period"; then major surgery that "consists of 'tying off' all five senses"; then the last, long-term phase called "Productive Work." Asked whether the project is too drastic, Mr. Jones dismisses the question: "This method has produced mental prodigies such as man has never imagined possible. Using tests developed by company researchers, the firm has measured I.Q.'s of three fully trained specimens at 974, 989, and 1005..."

It is the boy who brings a semblance of closure on the last day of the hearing. "I guess Mr. Jones is really the one who tipped the scales," the child explains. "He talked to me a long time this morning. He made me feel sure that a life dedicated to U. Lympho would at least be interesting. More interesting than anything that can happen to me now in school or at home.... Fascinating to be a specimen, truly fascinating. Do you suppose I really can develop an I.Q. of over

a thousand?"

But, a senator asks, does the boy really think he can forget everything in the Forgetting Chamber?

"I was wondering about that this morning," the boy replies. "About forgetting. I've always had an idea that each memory was a kind of picture, an insubstantial picture. I've thought of it as suddenly coming into your mind when you need it, something you've seen, something you've heard, then it may stay awhile, or else it flies out, then maybe it comes back another time. I was wondering about the Forgetting Chamber. If all the pictures went out, if I forgot everything, where would they go? Just out into the air? Into the sky? Back home, around my bed, where my dreams stay?"

Suppression of inconvenient memory often facilitated the trances that boosted the work of the Pentagon. But some contrary voices could be heard.

Lenny Bruce wasn't a household name when he died of a morphine overdose in August 1966, but he was widely known and had even performed on network television. His nightclub bits, captured on record albums, satirized the zeal of many upstanding moralistic pillars. One of Bruce's favorite routines described a visit to New York by top holy men of Christianity and Judaism. They go to Saint Patrick's Cathedral: "Christ and Moses standing in the back of Saint Pat's. Confused, Christ is, at the grandeur of the interior, the baroque interior, the rococo baroque interior. His route took him through Spanish Harlem. He would wonder what fifty Puerto Ricans were doing living in one room. That stained glass window is worth nine grand! Hmmmmm..."

In what turned out to be his final per-

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formances, Bruce took to reciting (with a thick German accent) lines from a poem by the Trappist monk Thomas Merton – a meditation on the high-ranking Nazi official Adolf Eichmann. “My defense? I was a soldier. I saw the end of a conscientious day’s effort. I watched through the portholes. I saw every Jew burned and turned into soap. Do you people think yourselves better because you burned your enemies at long distances with missiles? Without ever seeing what you’d done to them?”

We saw butterflies turn into bombers, and we weren’t dreaming. The 1960s had evolved into a competition between American excesses, with none – no matter how mind-blowing the psychedelic drugs or wondrous the sex or amazing the music festivals – able to overcome or undermine what the Pentagon was doing in Southeast Asia. As journalist Michael Herr observed in Vietnam: “We took space back quickly, expensively, with total panic and close to maximum brutality. Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop.” At the same time that Woodstock became an instant media legend in mid-August 1969, melodic yearning for peace was up against the cold steel of America’s war machinery. The gathering of 400,000 young

people at an upstate New York farm implicitly – and, for the most part, ineffectually – rejected the war and the assumptions fueling it. Jimi Hendrix’s rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner” was an apt soundtrack for U.S. foreign policy.

Days after the November 2004 election, while U.S. troops again moved into Fallujah for the slaughter, a dispatch from that city reported on the front page of the New York Times: “Nothing here makes sense, but the Americans’ superior training and firepower eventually seem to prevail.”

Superior violence, according to countless scripts, was righteous and viscerally satisfying. Television and movies, ever since childhood, presented greater violence as the ultimate weapon and final fix, uniquely able to put an end to conflict. Leaving menace for dead – you couldn’t beat that. But at home in the USA and far away, the practical and moral failures of violence became irrefutable. In Iraq, sources of unauthorized violence met with escalating American violence. In the United States, war opponents met with presidential contempt.

In a short story, published one hundred years ago, William Dean Howells wrote: “What a thing it is to have a country that can’t be wrong, but if it is, is right, anyway!”



19 NOVEMBER 2007

The poodles of the US news media

AT TIMES, long after laying the big flagstones on the path to war, mainstream US media outlets resolve to be more independent next time. And why not? As Mark Twain commented, “It’s easy to quit smoking. I’ve done it hundreds of times.”

When the president and his team set out to prepare the media ground for war, they can rely on a repetition compulsion that’s widespread in the American press. Major outlets seem unable to resist White House agenda-setting for war. Cases in point span decades, from Vietnam and the Dominican Republic to Grenada and Panama, to Iraq and Yugoslavia, to Afghanistan and Iraq again – with Iran likely to join the list next year.

Along the way, beginning with the 1991 Gulf war, the better performances of the British press compared to the American media – high jumps over low standards – have not prevented the British government from requiring the worst aspects of the special relationship by supplying troops and weaponry for US-initiated war efforts based on deception.

The political feasibility of waging these tragic wars can be largely traced to the US media’s reflexive capitulations to the administration in Washington – providing stenographic services far more often than tough scrutiny.

In the US, superficial self-critiques have become periodic rituals at big news organisations. But the basic and chronic failures to engage in independent journalism routinely elude serious examination, whether by the “public editor” at The New York Times or by The Washington Post’s in-house media columnist, Howard Kurtz, who has long double dipped as a punch pulling media critic on the CNN payroll. Such media institutions have no use for analysing deep-seated patterns of war reporting.

The belated and fuzzy outlines of the US media’s second thoughts are apt to appear long after the realtime coverage has aided and abetted Washington’s war planners. So, today, with few murmurs of concern from the powerhouse US media, the quality of reporting on the Iranian “threat” is scarcely more of a departure from the official White House line than what we were getting five years ago in countless stories about the menace of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

Since its release last summer, the full-length documentary film, *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* (based on my book of the same name) has been unanimously avoided by every one of the media outlets that it criticises, including CNN, Fox, MSNBC, the New York Times, the Washington Post, CBS, NBC and ABC. None opted to air a moment or print a word about the film,

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which is narrated by Sean Penn and includes stunning archival footage that undermines the pretensions of the nation's most prestigious news organisations. The documentary's critique is fundamental, and so is its indigestibility by the media that it takes on.

A pivotal assumption continues to hold in America's high journalistic places: if you're pro-war, you can be objective; if you're anti-war, you're biased.

Thus, as shown with network footage in *War Made Easy*, the widely esteemed then-ABC correspondent Ted Koppel intoned from the front line on camera at the outset of the Iraq invasion in March 2003: "I must say, I was trying to think of – I was trying to think of something that would be appropriate to say on an occasion like this, and as is often the case, the best you can come up with is something that Shakespeare wrote for Henry V, 'Wreak havoc and unleash the dogs of war'."

Very few eyebrows are raised when the most highly-touted US journalists cheerled the latest US war effort in the course of their reportorial duties. As I note in the film, "A news anchor will get no flak at all for mak-

ing statements that are supportive of a war and wouldn't dream of making a statement that's against a war."

The first UK public screening of *War Made Easy* is set for the evening of Tuesday November 27 at the Frontline Club in London. The documentary will also be shown on the following night at a cinema in an event sponsored by the Stop the War Coalition. (Days later, the film makes its debut at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam.)

British viewers may be taken aback to see the grotesque extent to which US presidents and American news media have jointly shouldered key propaganda chores for war launches during the last five decades. But complacency would be ill-advised. The American media may be in a particularly degraded and craven state while covering the great issues of war and peace, but the tandem machinations of George Bush and Tony Blair – and indications that the current British government is unwilling to challenge the war cries from Washington now aimed at Tehran – do not attest to overall political or journalistic health in either country.



23 NOVEMBER 2007

Good news for Americans: Your wages are flat

THE ECONOMIC coverage was fairly typical on a recent broadcast of the radio program Day to Day, airing nationwide from NPR News.

“There’s actually some good news out today about the American economy,” host Madeleine Brand announced. Then she introduced a reporter from the widely heard Marketplace show, Jill Barshay, who proceeded to offer the type of explanation that’s all too common in media accounts of economic trends.

“Well, just to be clear, we’re talking about worker productivity, which is how much stuff we make every hour,” Barshay replied. “And the Labor Department reported this morning that the hourly output per worker increased 4.9 percent in the third quarter. That’s the biggest jump in labor productivity we’ve seen since 2003. Another part of the report also says that labor costs fell a bit, so we’ve got employees being more productive and costing companies less. And this is important because it shows that the economy might be able to grow without generating inflation.”

Let’s unpack that narrative. From the outset, wages are described only as “labor costs” – which fell, “so we’ve got employees being more productive and costing companies less.”

With that kind of setup near the top of a

story, it’s just a hop, skip and a jump to depicting higher income for workers as a threat to the country’s economic well-being.

“Productivity is the economy’s best defense against inflation and recession,” the reporter went on, “and that’s because wages are the most important cost to companies, and most of our wages do go up every year, even if it’s just a little cost of living adjustment.”

And Barshay added: “So if we’re producing the same amount of stuff every year, then companies have a choice. They either can pass on these wage costs in the form of higher prices on the products we buy, or they take a hit to their profits. So if we’re producing more stuff, if we’re being more productive like we have in this past quarter, then we don’t have to worry so much about higher consumer prices or falling corporate profits.”

I don’t know about you, but I don’t worry much about “falling profits.” Few working people do. What we worry about is job insecurity, lousy working conditions, unpaid hours, evaporating pensions, and healthcare coverage that’s either woefully inadequate or nonexistent.

But during that Nov. 7 news segment on Day to Day, a key theme was the menace of “falling corporate profits.”

The idea that all of us should yearn for high corporate profits is convenient for cor-

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porate underwriters and advertisers. But key questions go unasked. Such as: Don't outsized corporate profits actually represent ripoffs of workers and consumers alike – in effect, underpricing our time and overpricing our purchases?

Such questions, however, are not often asked in mass media. Instead, we keep hearing and seeing coverage about the need to contain the “costs” of paying employees – a frame of reference that portrays an upsurge in worker compensation as a threat to economic well-being rather than an enhancement of it.

As usual, the validity of the reportage hinges on where you sit. If you're a business

owner or major investor, then you may not want to see bigger checks going into pay envelopes. But relatively few of us are company owners or big investors. Most of us depend on income from our own labor.

An insidious aspect of such frequent stories, equating the health of “the economy” with the ability of corporations to hold down payroll “expenses,” is that they discount the importance of the most common human experiences. Routinely, in media-land, people who work for a living are consigned to the peripheral vision of news accounts, while economically powerful individuals and institutions keep occupying the center stage.



12 DECEMBER 2007

The USA's human rights daze

THE chances are slim that you saw much news coverage of Human Rights Day when it blew past the media radar – as usual – on Dec. 10.

Human rights may be touted as a treasured principle in the United States, but the assessed value in medialand is apt to fluctuate widely on the basis of double standards and narrow definitions.

Every political system, no matter how repressive or democratic, is able to amp up public outrage over real or imagined violations of human rights. News media can easily fixate on stories of faraway injustice and cruelty. But the lofty stances end up as posturing to the extent that a single standard is not applied.

When U.S.-allied governments torture political prisoners, the likelihood of U.S. media scrutiny is much lower than the probability of media righteousness against governments reviled by official Washington.

But what are “human rights” anyway? In the USA, we mostly think of them as freedom to speak, assemble, worship and express opinions. Of course those are crucial rights. Yet they hardly span the broad scope that’s spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

That document – adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on Dec. 10, 1948 – affirms “human rights” in the ways

that U.S. media outlets commonly illuminate the meaning of the term. But the Declaration of Human Rights also defines the rights of all human beings to include “freedom from fear and want” – and not only as generalities. For instance, the first clause of Article 23 states: “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.”

And: “Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work”; the right “to form and to join trade unions”; and, overall, “an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.”

Perhaps the farthest afield from the customary U.S. media parameters is Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which insists: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

Measured with such yardsticks for human rights, the United States falls far short of many countries. If American news media did a better job of reporting on human rights in all their dimensions, we’d

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be less self-satisfied as a nation – and more outraged about the widespread violations of human rights that persist every day.

The human consequences of those violations are incalculable, but they're largely removed from the center stage of dramas that fill news pages and newscasts. This downplaying of economic human rights is not mere happenstance. The violations are sys-

temic – within a system that thrives on extreme inequities, creating enormous profits for corporations and enriching some individuals along the way.

Within the boundaries of dominant news media and mainline political discourse, the “issue” of human rights is in a narrow box. It severely limits the humanity of our social order.



19 DECEMBER 2007

The mad corporate world of Glenn Beck

Then I picked up a ringing phone one morning in mid-December, the next thing I knew a producer was inviting me to appear on Glenn Beck's TV show.

Beck has become a national phenom with his nightly hour of polemics on CNN Headline News – urging war on Iran, denouncing “political correctness” at home, trashing immigrants who don't speak English, mocking environmentalists as repressive zealots, and generally trying to denigrate progressive outlooks.

Our segment, the producer said, would focus on a recent NBC news report praising the virtues of energy-efficient LED light bulbs without acknowledging that the network's parent company, General Electric, sells them. I figured it was a safe bet that Beck's enthusiasm for full disclosure from media would be selective.

A few hours later, I was staring into a camera lens at the CNN bureau in San Francisco while Beck launched into his opening. What had occurred on the “NBC Nightly News,” he explained, “was at best a major breach of journalistic integrity.” And he pointed out: “The problem isn't what NBC is promoting. It's what they're not disclosing.”

A minute later, Beck asked his first question: “Norman, you agree with me that they should have disclosed this?” The unedited

transcript tells what happened next.

SOLOMON: “It's a big problem when there's not disclosure. I'm glad you opened this up. And I wouldn't want any viewers of this program to be left with the impression that somehow General Electric is an environmentally conscious company.

“On the contrary, they have a 30-year history of refusing and actually fighting against efforts to make them clean up the Hudson River, which GE fouled with terrible quantities of horrific PCBs, other rivers as well. People told they can't fish in the Hudson River. General Electric still lobbying to not have to clean up.

“General Electric, even today – and this report is very timely – General Electric is lobbying to get Congress to pass \$18 billion in taxpayer-backed loan guarantees for a huge GE product which is General Electric components for nuclear power plants. So we should not be fooled in any way by efforts to greenwash General Electric or any other company.”

BECK: “You know what's amazing to me? GE has a bigger budget for – special interest budget than all of the oil companies combined, and yet nobody says anything. Let me reverse this.

“Norman, do you think if I got on as somebody who says I don't know what we

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can do about global warming, I'm not sure man causes it, and I certainly don't want to have laws and regulations on this, if I got on and said that but I was being – my corporate – my corporate parent was Exxon Mobil, do you think I'd get away with that for a second without that being on the front page of the New York Times?"

SOLOMON: "Well, other networks, including General Electric's NBC, have been very slow on global warming. And in fact, General Electric has major interest in components and products used by the oil and gas industry.

"I think if you look across the board, all the major networks, even so-called public broadcasting, which has Chevron underwriting its 'Washington Week' program every Friday, there is a problem, as you say. I think your words are very apt, 'promoting' but 'not disclosing.'

"But let's be clear about this, Glenn. I have a list here, for instance, that I jotted down.

"ABC, owned by Disney. ABC doesn't disclose in their relevant news reports about Disney's stake in sweatshops.

"Fox News – and now as of the last couple of days now, Wall Street Journal owned by the same entity, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp – they don't disclose that the ownership is entangled with the Chinese government to the detriment of human rights but to the advancement of the profit margin of the parent company."

BECK: "See –"

SOLOMON: "We would be remiss, Glenn, if we left out CNN, because CNN has a huge multi, multibillion-dollar stake in Internet deregulation and the failure of the Congress

to safeguard so far what would be called net neutrality. So every time CNN does a news report on the Internet, on efforts to regulate or deregulate or create a two- or three-tier system of the Internet, CNN News should disclose that Time Warner, the parent company, stands to gain or lose billions of dollars in those terms.

"And one more thing."

BECK: "Real quick."

SOLOMON: "A major – a major advertiser for CNN is the largest military contractor in the United States, Lockheed Martin. So when you and others –"

BECK: "I got news for you, Norman. Norman –"

SOLOMON: "– promote war – when you and others promote war on this network –"

BECK: "Norman – Norman –"

SOLOMON: "– we have Lockheed Martin paying millions of dollars undisclosed. So I would quote you –"

BECK: "Norman – Norman –"

SOLOMON: "Promoting but not disclosing is a bad way to go."

BECK: "Norman, let me just tell you this. First of all, Lockheed Martin is not a – not a corporate overlord of this program."

SOLOMON: "It's a major advertiser on CNN."

BECK: "That's fine. That's fine. Advertisers are different. But let –"

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SOLOMON: “Well, it is fine, but it should be disclosed.”

BECK: “Norman, let me just tell you something. If you think that it’s warmonger central downstairs at CNN, you’re out of your mind. But that’s a different story.”

SOLOMON: “Well, upstairs, when I watch Glenn Beck, in terms of attacking Iran, it certainly is. It’s lucrative for the oil companies, as well as for the major advertiser on CNN, Lockheed Martin.”

BECK: “But we’re not talking about advertisers. We are talking about —”

SOLOMON: “Well, you don’t want to talk about it. So let’s talk about the Internet stake.”

BECK: “No, no, no. Norman —”

SOLOMON: “Let’s talk about the Internet stake that the owners of CNN have. Huge profits to be made or lost by the parent company of CNN depending on what happens in Washington in terms of Internet regulation.”

BECK: “Norman, let me tell you something.”

SOLOMON: “That should be acknowledged, don’t you think?”

BECK: “Absolutely. And if it was on this program, it would be acknowledged.

“I thank you very much for your time.

“That just goes to show you, you’ve got to beware of everybody who you’re getting

your news from. Wouldn’t it be nice if once in a while somebody came on and said, you know, I don’t really have an agenda except the truth? It’s my truth. If you don’t like it, you should go someplace else.”

During the back-and-forth, I’d understated the present-day role of Chevron as a funder of key news programming on PBS. Actually the Chevron Corporation, which signed on as an underwriter of “Washington Week” last year, no longer helps pay the piper there — but the massive energy firm does currently funnel big bucks to the most influential show on PBS, the nightly “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.”

The corporate funders of the “NewsHour” now include not only Chevron but also AT&T and Pacific Life. There must be dozens of journalistic reports on the program every week — whether relevant to the business worlds of energy, communications or insurance — that warrant, and lack, real-time disclosures while the news accounts are on the air. Meanwhile, over at “Washington Week,” the corporate cash now flows in from the huge military contractor Boeing and the National Mining Association.

And that’s just “public broadcasting.” On avowedly commercial networks, awash in corporate ownership interests and advertising revenues, a thorough policy of disclosure in the course of news coverage would require that most of the airtime be devoted to shedding light on the media outlet conflicts-of-interest of the reporting in progress.

And what about Glenn Beck? The guy is another in a long line of demagogues riding a bull market for pseudo-populism. Brought to you by too many corporate interests to name.



21 DECEMBER 2007

Announcing the PU-litzer Prizes for 2007

MANY journalists qualified for the sixteenth annual P.U.-litzer Prizes, but only a few were able to win recognition for turning in one of the truly stinkiest media performances of the year. As the judges for this un-coveted award, Jeff Cohen and I have done our best to confer this honor on the most deserving. And now, the winners of the P.U.-litzers for 2007:

SPINNING FOR ANOTHER WAR AWARD – Michael Gordon of The New York Times

Continuing where he left off before the Iraq invasion, when he used unnamed official sources to produce wildly inaccurate page-one articles on Iraq's alleged weapons threat, Gordon in February wrote a front-page story with the stunning claim that Iran's Supreme Leader had approved sending lethal explosives into Iraq to attack U.S. soldiers. (Even President Bush soon backed away from the claim.) Readers might have had trouble assessing Gordon's charges – which were, as usual, almost entirely based on anonymous sources: "United States intelligence asserts ... Administration officials said ... Some American intelligence experts believe ..." After analyzing the article, blogger Jonathan Schwarz speculated that "Gordon is not an actual person, but rather a voice-activated tape recorder."

"SOMETHING ABOUT A RETRO MACHO MAN" AWARD – Chris Matthews, host of MSNBC's "Hardball"

With a worshipful media wind pushing actor and former senator Fred Thompson toward the presidential race in June, Matthews lauded Thompson's "sex appeal" and "star quality." The hardballer was nearly rapturous as he said: "Can you smell the English Leather on this guy, the Aqua Velva, the sort of mature man's shaving cream, or whatever, you know, after he shaved? Do you smell that sort of – a little bit of cigar smoke? You know, whatever."

Four years earlier, when George Bush flew onto an aircraft carrier to celebrate "Mission Accomplished" in Iraq, Matthews had gushed at length about the president's looks and how Americans love "a guy who has a little swagger. We like having a hero as president. We're not like the Brits."

"AMERICANS DON'T WANT UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE" AWARD – Jeff Greenfield of CBS, et al.

Reflecting what became mainstream media's conventional wisdom in the wake of Michael Moore's "SiCKO" documentary, CBS correspondent Greenfield explained that the U.S. lacks a universal healthcare system not because of the powerful insurance lobby – but because "Americans are just different." He quoted an academic who

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said Americans, unlike Canadians and Europeans, don't want government involvement in healthcare: "It's a cultural difference."

Actually, CBS's own poll of Americans had found 64 percent supporting the view that the federal government should "guarantee health insurance for all" – with 60 percent approving of higher taxes to pay for it. A CNN poll found 64 percent American support for the idea that "government should provide a national health insurance program for all Americans, even if this would require higher taxes."

"3-H CLUB" PRIZE – Too Many to Name

At the same time they're imposing their own fixations on candidates, elite political reporters like to pretend that they have absolutely no idea why the candidates are struggling to overcome those fixations. A Dec. 11 Washington Post article deadpanned: "[John] Edwards has faced challenges of his own, namely 'the three H's' – his expensive haircut, his hedge fund work after the 2004 election, and his sprawling homestead."

Dozens of news reports in major outlets have deployed the "three H's" shorthand, many implying that Edwards – unlike the wealthy candidates who never mention the poor – is a hypocrite when he discusses poverty. In July, the Post's John Solomon devoted an entire investigative article to Edwards' pricey haircuts: "It is some kind of commentary on the state of American politics that as Edwards has campaigned," mused the reporter, "his hair seems to have attracted as much attention, as say, his position on healthcare." Gee, how did that happen?

RISKY DEMOCRATS AWARD – L.A.

Times, Washington Post

If you believe certain political pundits and reporters, Democrats are continuously pushing "risky" proposals that are off-putting to the American public. In November, a Los Angeles Times report – headlined "Democrats Calculate Risk on Tax Hikes" – called proposed Democratic tax hikes on wealthier Americans "a major political gamble." (Unmentioned was the fact that Bill Clinton raised taxes on the rich and was re-elected, or that a Gallup poll shows 66 percent of Americans think "upper income people" don't currently pay enough taxes.) Days later, a Washington Post report was headlined "Climate is a Risky Issue for Democrats; Candidates Back Costly Proposals." (Unmentioned was the Post's own poll showing that 70 percent of Americans think the federal government "should do more" on global warming; only 7 percent said "it should do less.") Listening to press corps cautions may heighten Democratic timidity – but it hasn't won many national elections.

SPINNING HAWKS INTO DOVES

AWARD – ABC, CNN, Fox, CBS

and others

There'd be little news value in Iraq war boosters returning from a brief trip to Iraq and endorsing troop escalation. But by presenting two self-acknowledged Iraq war supporters – Ken Pollack and Michael O'Hanlon – as doves, national outlets created a fictitious story line and major media push this summer in support of the war.

Few media "experts" had argued more relentlessly for war in 2002 than Pollack, author of "The Case for Invading Iraq." Yet here was ABC anchor Charles Gibson this July: "A bit of a surprise today on Iraq. Two long and persistent critics of the Bush ad-

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ministration's handling of the war today wrote a column in The New York Times saying that after a recent eight-day visit to Iraq, they find significant changes taking place." CNN called them "two fierce critics." A Fox reporter claimed the duo had "changed their views after seeing some of the military successes first-hand." CBS spoke of how O'Hanlon "now believes [the troop surge] should be continued" – even though he'd written a national column seven months earlier: "A Skeptic's Case for the Surge."

PUTTING CLOTHES ON THE EMPEROR PRIZE – New York Times

After numerous inside accounts of the Iraq invasion and other policies had exposed Vice President Cheney as a true believer who often put ideology ahead of data and facts, readers may have thought The New York Times was joking when it reported in February on the impact that the perjury trial of Cheney's chief of staff would have on the vice president. According to the newspaper of record: "The trial has chipped away at the public image of Mr. Cheney as a sober-minded policy architect."

"IT'S TRUE BECAUSE WE SAID IT" AWARD – CNN's Lou Dobbs

To prove his claim that illegal immigrants were bringing "once eradicated diseases" into our country, Dobbs featured a CNN reporter in 2005 who claimed that the U.S. had seen only 900 cases of leprosy for 40 years – but that "there have been 7,000 in the past three years." This year, in May, Dobbs was challenged on the shocking statistic by Lesley Stahl on "60 Minutes," who cited a federal report saying there were 7,000 leprosy cases over the last 30 years. Dobbs

response: "If we reported it, it's a fact."

Stahl: "How can you guarantee that to me?"

Dobbs: "Because I'm the managing editor, and that's the way we do business. We don't make up numbers, Lesley. Do we?"

You do, Lou. The Centers for Disease Control report that new leprosy cases in the U.S. have been on the decline for close to 20 years (with 166 cases in 2005).

THE LOU DOBBS US-vs.-THEM AWARD – Bill O'Reilly of Fox News

Talking to Sen. John McCain in May, O'Reilly said: "But do you understand what The New York Times wants, and the far-left want? They want to break down the white, Christian, male power structure, which you're a part of, and so am I. And they want to bring in millions of foreign nationals to basically break down the structure that we have. In that regard, Pat Buchanan is right."

"WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WOLFOWITZ" AWARD – Newsweek

As he was being forced out of his job as World Bank president in May, Paul Wolfowitz was described by Newsweek as "a man whose managerial talents do not appear to rise to the level of his analytical prowess. By most accounts, Wolfowitz is a genteel, brilliant figure ..."

The Newsweek piece – headlined "With the Best of Intentions" – didn't mention how the brilliant and analytical former Deputy Defense Secretary had insisted just before invading Iraq that the country had no history of ethnic strife, that the U.S. would not need to deploy more than 100,000 troops, or that the war might cost as little as \$10 billion. (So far it has cost about \$500 billion.)



27 DECEMBER 2007

Channelling Suze Orman

WAS near the deadline for a column when I glanced at a TV screen. “The Suze Orman Show,” airing on CNBC at prime time, exerted a powerful force in my hotel room. And the fate of this column was sealed.

Orman made a big splash many years ago on public television – the incubating environment for her as a national phenom. With articulate calls for intelligent self-determination of one’s own financial future, she is a master of the long form. Humor and dramatic cadences punch up the impacts of her performances.

Seeing her the other night, within a matter of seconds, I realized that the jig was up. How could a mere underachieving syndicated columnist hope to withstand the blandishments and certainties of Suze Orman, bestselling author and revered eminence from the erudite bastions of PBS to the hard-boiled financial realms of General Electric’s CNBC?

To resist was pointless. What if I tried to write as a carping critic? After all, Suze Orman has already explained that such critics, particularly the males of the species, just resent a strong woman with the guts, smarts and determination to cast off the shackles of a retrograde past. “Ladies,” I could hear her say from the stage, with one of her magnificent flourishes, “don’t let that

nonsense wreck your future.”

So, in hopes of putting myself in sync with her redemptive power, I turn the rest of this particular column over to a distillation of Suze Orman’s messaging:

(The following paragraphs are not quotations from Orman; they summarize the gist of her repertoire on stage.)

Your money, your life. It’s as simple as that. Ladies – and you men, too – the time is past when we hold back. Not having control over our own money is something we can’t afford, and I mean that literally. We just cannot afford it.

I’ll be blunt here. Anyone who tells you there’s something wrong with getting rich and then richer has some serious unresolved problems. Heh heh.

If you want a solution, you go out and grab it. You rule money or money will rule you. People who can’t wrap their minds around that vital concept – they get nowhere.

You want to solve social problems, start with yourself. If you can’t let yourself accumulate wealth, you’re part of a social problem – like I used to be. Now I do very well, thank you, and I don’t want to hear about how some financial company is making money from my self-help website. Sure, I’m getting richer all the time. You got a prob-

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lem with that?

The more people get rich, the happier I am. Even a leader of the Chinese Communists (and you know what dummies they were) said it straight out maybe 30 years ago “it’s glorious to be rich.” The baggage we’re still carrying around tells us not to mind if some guy says it but if I as a woman make the same point then the knives come out. Ladies, to hell with that. We’re not going back.

It’s not glorious to be low-income, that’s for damn sure. I know what that’s like. Now I go back to PBS at pledge time, and they welcome me with open arms. Public broadcasting. Makes me almost sentimental. But catch me on CNBC these days, and you’ll see that I’m swimming with the big-money fish. I was a waitress for a pathetically long time. I had to find the courage. The courage, ladies. And I did. Now look at me.

I don’t just want you to plan for the fu-

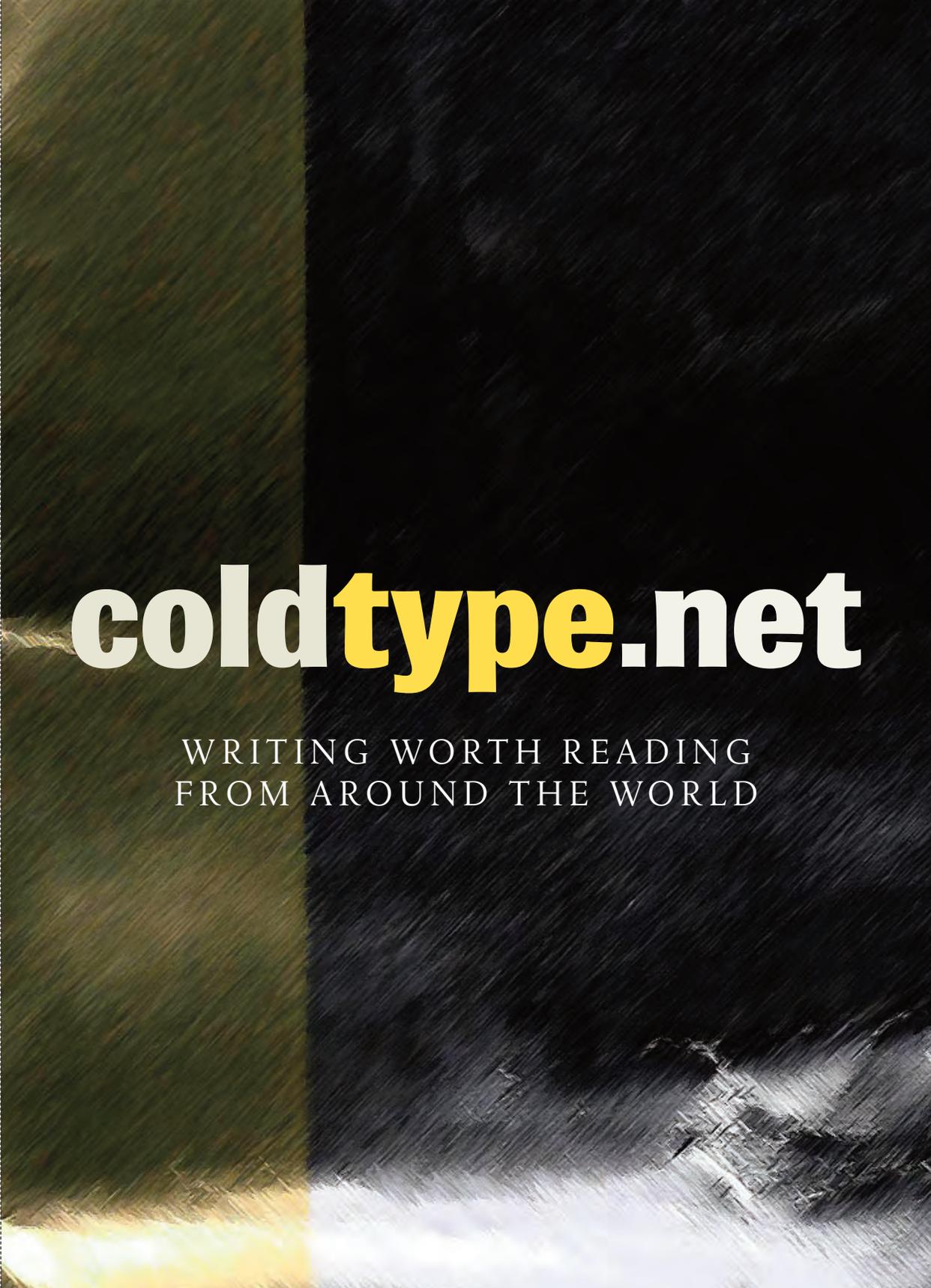
ture. I want you to make enough money to buy your future: lock, stock and barrel. Money money money. I’ve got it on the brain, and I make no apology. I love money. It’s freedom, and ladies – you can earn freedom if you apply yourselves.

Some people can’t stop complaining that the economic system has winners and losers. Whether they realize it or not, that’s probably because they’re bound and determined to be losers. Well, I think it’s a heck of a lot better to be a winner – don’t you?

What kind of media future do you think I would’ve had if I chose to keep complaining about the system because of losers? I’d probably be a loser too! Not if I can help it. And I can, obviously.

So, I’m rich. And I’m trying to inform you about how to get rich, too. If you can’t make it happen, maybe you haven’t listened to my wisdom closely enough. You got a problem with that?





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