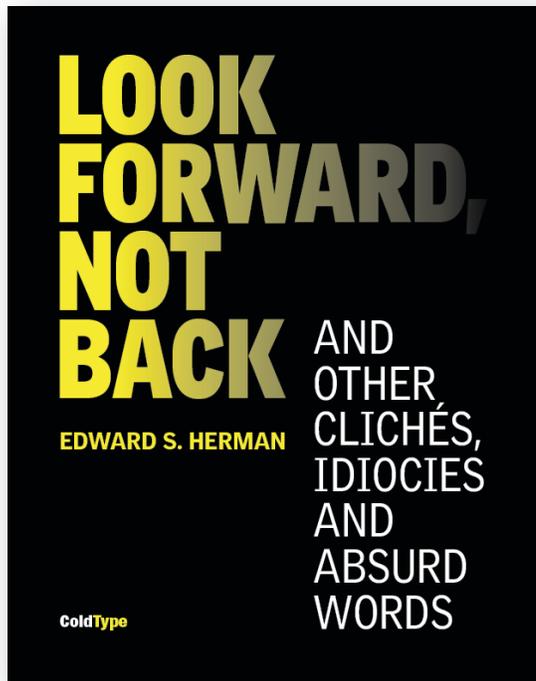


**LOOK
FORWARD,
NOT
BACK**

EDWARD S. HERMAN

AND
OTHER
CLICHÉS,
IDIOCIES
AND
ABSURD
WORDS

ColdType



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LOOK FORWARD, NOT BACK

AND OTHER CLICHÉS, IDIOCIES AND ABSURD WORDS

EDWARD S. HERMAN

One of my favorites clichés of today is “look forward, not back,” also a favorite of President Obama and Vice President Biden. These leaders are under a certain amount of pressure to prosecute, or at least investigate, the Bush-Cheney gang’s war crimes and violations of U.S. and international law. There is also the matter of principle: That is, whether there can be said to be a “rule of law” when high level but serious violators of law are beyond prosecution. Barry Bonds must be pursued because he allegedly may have lied to a grand jury on his use of steroids, but Bush-Cheney-Rice-Rumsfeld-Powell lied many times on issues involving mass killing and violations of domestic and international law. Of course they haven’t lied before a grand jury, but that is because the establishment won’t let them be put before a grand jury. But what then happens to that famous “deterrent” that is so important when the establishment deals with and punishes

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lower-class law violators?

This use of the “look forward” cliché today is in the Pelosi “impeachment-off-the-table” mold, which is itself in the Democratic Party tradition of bipartisanship and agreement that international law doesn’t apply to this country and its leaders (or to those of a major client state like Israel). Dean Acheson said it way back in 1963 before the American Society of International Law: No “legal issue” can arise when U.S. “power, position, and prestige” are at stake. In that same tradition Bill Clinton was pleased to bomb the al-Shifra pharmaceutical plant in the Sudan in 1998 and attack Yugoslavia in 1999, in violation of the UN Charter, and Obama himself has quickly joined this great tradition. Veteran analyst of Afghan civilian casualties Marc Herold credits Obama with 72 Afghan civilian killings during January 21-February 23, with no perceptible slowing down of the kill rate from that of the Bush-Cheney era (Herold, “Seventy-Two Af-

ghan Civilians Killed by U.S/NATO since Obama Took the Reins,” Diagonal No. 97, marzo 5-19, 2009, Madrid, forthcoming in Spanish).

Of course, sometimes we must look back. Even after the NATO defeat of Yugoslavia and occupations of Bosnia and Kosovo, Milosevic had to be pursued and the Bosnian Serb leaders Mladic and Karadzic captured and brought to trial, because the Bosnian Muslims cannot move forward until they obtain justice. The Serbs must apologize often and humbly and must cough up each Serb participant in the earlier wars demanded by the ICTY, both in the interests of justice and to obtain world forgiveness and reentry into the community of honorable states that only kill in self-defense. The Srebrenica massacre must be remembered each year for the same reasons--of the still-to-be realized justice to the satisfaction of the victims and the need for sincere apologies and proper behavior by the guilty population. So the Serbs also cannot move forward without looking back. Furthermore, how could the United States and NATO justify the followup “humanitarian interventions” in Afghanistan and Iraq unless it is proven in (kangaroo) court and reiterated that justice had triumphed in Yugoslavia?

By the same politicized and power-based double standard, Vietnam war leaders Nixon and Johnson—and the many scores of their killer colleagues like Walt and Eugene Rostow, George and William Bundy, Robert “Blowtorch” Komer, William Colby, and William Westmoreland—could prosper and die in bed, because the millions of dead Vietnamese victims had no avenues through which they could realize justice; there was no tribunal created by the UN Security Council to pursue the big-time criminals



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in that case. The lesser but still impressive killers in Western client states, like Suharto and the Shah of Iran, could also prosper and die in bed. Israel has been able to “move forward” in seizing Palestinian land, with positive assistance from the same powers that have required justice for victims in the former Yugoslavia. In short, in the Age of Kafka the global double standard on the link between justice and “moving forward” is truly impressive.

Projection cliché
— the violent “extremists”

In his very useful book *The Liberal Defense of Murder*, Richard Seymour quotes Christopher Hitchens’ friend Martin Amis, who says “The extremists, for now, have the monopoly of violence, intimidation, and self-righteousness.” Bush, Blair, Olmert and their gangs are clearly not the “extremists” Amis has in mind—Bush and friends are the “self-defense” folks just striving for a wee bit of security and human rights, and fighting off the invasions of their territory by the Islamo-fascists. The pitiful giant, with 50 percent of the arms budget of the earth, invading or bombing at least three countries right now, is being overwhelmed by the violent folks, “for now.” Among the other things that make this projection comical, the Pentagon’s National Security statement of 2002 was quite clear on the intent to monopolize the means of violence and to prevent any challenger to this monopoly position from realizing that challenge, implicitly by force. .But I guess that was all a bluff by a gang that knew that the Islamo-fascists had them whipped, for now.

This kind of idiocy may rest in part on the ultra-self-righteousness of the Western racist-nationalist-imperialist bloc and

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their pundits and thinkers, who don't count Western arms and Western aggression and murder as violence any more than they can use the word "extremists" to refer to their home-grown big-time aggression enthusiasts, managers, and killers. One frequently reads about Western officials demanding that the people who are resisting Western encroachments and rule "eschew violence." Only one side has a right to arms, occupation of somebody else's land, "self-defense," and violence—only when "we" do it it cannot be called violence.

This is closely analogous to the treatment of "terrorism." Retail terrorism by dissidents, rebels, and resisters to a Western or Western-back state (e.g., the African National Congress in apartheid South Africa), is "terrorism" (the ANC was listed as a terrorist organization by the Pentagon in 1988, but not Jonas Savimbi and UNITA in Angola, supported by South Africa and the United States). State terrorism, often extremely violent, and commonly using torture, regularly induces resistance (e.g., Israeli versus Palestinian; Guatemalan military versus Mayan victims). But state terrorism is not called terrorism, it is "retaliation" or "counter-terrorism." It is also not "violence," an invidious word reserved for the Western-designated bad guys, taking its place alongside "terrorism."

Nuttiest argument for the Iraq invasion-Occupation: Nick Cohen on getting rid of the Iraq sanctions regime

The establishment intellectuals and pundits quickly adjusted the reasons for the Iraq invasion-occupation from protecting our national security from Saddam's WMD to our desire to bring liberty to the Iraq people. Their ability to do this while Bush-Cheney were busy reducing



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U.S. liberty, cozying up to Karimov and Mushareff, and struggling as long as they could to prevent free elections in Iraq itself, is really touching on their patriotic ardor and capacity for self-deception. The classic here is Michael Ignatieff's NYT Magazine piece "Who Are Americans To Think That Freedom Is Theirs To Spread" (June 26, 2005), where the author feels no obligation to prove the liberation goal beyond the fact that Bush declared it to be so. This swallowing of a completely implausible propaganda line was extremely widespread in the United States, running from George Packer in the *New Yorker* and Frank Rich in the *New York Times* to the entire rightwing stable at Fox.

It was also widespread in Britain. Seymour quotes British journalist Nick Cohen, a noted member of the UK branch of the cruise missile left, who was enthused at the prospect of a "multiracial devolved democracy, which stands up for human rights," which he saw as the outcome of the invasion-occupation. Seymour also notes Cohen's questioning of "how Noam Chomsky and John Pilger manage to oppose a war which would end the sanctions they claim have slaughtered hundreds of thousands of children who otherwise would have had happy, healthy lives in a prison state." Of course, Cohen isn't admitting those children's deaths from sanctions, but what an idiotic line of thought!. The sanctions were imposed by the two imperial states at the expense of those children (their deaths were "worth it," according to Madeleine Albright), and could have been ended by their simply deciding that more sanctions-deaths of children were no longer worth it. This never seems to occur to Cohen, who is offering implicit apologetics for those sanctions killings.

But the further irony is that the invasion-occupation that Cohen is defending in the quoted passage killed hundreds of thousands more Iraqis, and the children of Iraq are not living “happy, healthy lives” in a wonderful democracy. So Cohen offers crude apologetics for two phases of the imperial mass killing of Iraqis, and he demonstrates a complete incapacity to analyse and forecast the imperial goals and processes of his leaders as they did their dirty work in that victim country. But on the other hand, his service to those imperial leaders and the imperial state is exemplary.

“We” and “Our”

Who is included in “we” and “our”? In the political system it is notorious that members of the elite use “we” and “our” when they appeal to the underlying population even as they are in the midst of betraying the general citizenry. They are protecting “our security” in Afghanistan, and advancing “our” economic interests as they pour taxpayer dollars into Citicorp and AIG. However, they are sometimes honest about a narrower meaning of “we,” almost always in exchanges within their in-group. This was given public expression when the fired and angry former Secretary of the Treasury, Paul O’Neill, told the story of his exchanges over tax policy with Cheney and Rove to Ron Suskind, whose book *The Price of Loyalty* is built on O’Neill’s words and documents. In 2004 O’Neill, a conservative and former CEO of the Aluminum Company of America, opposed Cheney and Rove on tax cuts on dividends and further cuts for upper income groups. O’Neill thought the rich had had enough by then at the expense of the middle class. But Cheney’s response to O’Neill was that “We won the midterms. This is



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our due.” The “our” is telling. Bush had once publicly admitted that fat cats were his real constituency— Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* includes a video of Bush speaking at a fund-raising dinner, saying “This is an impressive crowd -- the Haves, and the Have-Mores. Some people call you ‘The Elite’. I call you my ‘Base’. [Laughter].” And Cheney, responding to O’Neill, is obviously talking about those Haves and Have Mores as “our” people. In this exchange, as reported by Suskind, Bush actually suggested that maybe the middle class should be given a break at this point, but Cheney demured, and Suskind-O’Neill state that Rove chimed in appealing to Bush to “stick to principle.” The principle is presumably trickle-down theory, or maybe the “principle” is Cheney’s view that “we” won the election hence have the right to reward ourselves—a right of conquest. These are principles of class warfare, put into reality in the Bush years, but certainly with the help of the mainstream media and Democrats.

We should note that Ignatieff’s view that it is “Americans” who think that freedom is “Theirs To Spread,” is in the same deceptive tradition of implying that what the elite support is what the American people want. The editors of the *New York Times* obviously approved of this refurbished Bush twist of apologetics for invading and occupying Iraq, but they also approved the original invasion based on the threat of WMD, backed by the war-propaganda reporting of Michael Gordon and Judith Miller and their commentary columns by Kenneth Pollack and company. The public was less enthused and had to be lied to by the Bush team and *New York Times*. “We” the public didn’t want this war and increasingly disapproved it, but the elite “we” supported it.

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