

**INSIDE:** YESWECANISTAN ● HAVE ISRAELI SPIES  
INVADED YOUR AIRPORT? ● WRITING HISTORY  
IN THE STREETS ● AFGHANISTAN'S SHAM ARMY

# The <sup>ColdType</sup> READER

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## OBAMA'S WAR: WHAT WOULD MUHAMMAD ALI SAY?

“ I'M NOT going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over. This is the day when such evils must come to an end. ... If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to 22 million of my people, they wouldn't have to draft me, I'd join tomorrow. I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So I'll go to jail, so what? We've been in jail for 400 years ”

**DAVE ZIRIN** - PAGE 11



# Writing history in the streets

**Rebecca Solnit** remembers the upsurge in people power in Seattle in 1999 and Berlin in 1989

**A**t the climate change summit in Copenhagen, the wealthy nations that produce most of the excess carbon in our atmosphere will almost certainly fail to embrace measures adequate to ward off the devastation of our planet by heat and chaotic weather. Their leaders will probably promise us teaspoons with which to put out the firestorm and insist that springing for fire hoses would be far too onerous a burden for business to bear. They have already backed off from any binding deals at this global summit. There will be a lot of wrangling about who should cut what when, and how, with a lot of nations claiming that they would act if others would act first. Activists – farmers, environmentalists, island-dwellers – around the world will try to write a different future, a bolder one, and if anniversaries are an omen, then they have history on their side.

A decade ago, and a decade before that, popular power turned the tide of history. November 30, 1999, was the day that activists shut down a World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle and started to chart another course for the planet than the one that corporations and their servant nation-states had presumed they'd execute without impediment. Since then, events have strayed increasingly far from the WTO's road map for global domination and the financial scenarios that captains of

industry once liked to entertain.

Until that day when tens of thousands of protestors poured into the streets of Seattle (as well as other cities from Winnipeg to Athens, Limerick to Seoul), the might of the corporations made their agenda seem nothing short of inevitable – and then, suddenly, it wasn't. Disrupted by demonstrators outside its door and, on the inside, by dissent from poor nations galvanized by the ruckus, the meeting collapsed in confusion. Today, the WTO is puny compared to its ambitions only a decade ago.

The mass civil disobedience in the streets was, in a way, an answer to another landmark day a decade earlier: November 9, 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell and tens of thousands of Germans swarmed across the forbidden zone splitting their once and future capital city to celebrate, and eventually to reunite their nation. The fall of the Wall is now often remembered as if the gracious acquiescence of officialdom brought it about. It was not so.

"I announced the wall would open, but it was only the pressure by the people that made it possible" said Günter Schabowski, then-East German Communist Party central committee spokesperson, earlier this year. Had those East Germans not shown up and overwhelmed the guards at the Wall, nothing would have changed that night. In fact, popular will toppled several

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regimes that season. Thanks to creative civil-society organizing, steadfastness, astonishing courage, and imagination, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary also slipped out of the Soviet bloc and so out of a version of communism tantamount to totalitarianism as well.

There was a lot of triumphalism in the West thereafter. From the White House to business magazines and newspapers came a drumbeat of pronouncements that communism had failed and capitalism had triumphed. As it happened, those weren't the binaries at stake in the astonishing uprisings that season in Eastern Europe, or in the failed uprising in Tiananmen Square in the Chinese capital Beijing that spring. People certainly wanted freedom, but it wasn't the freedom to trade mysterious debt instruments and buy Double Whoppers, exactly. Nor was it capitalism, but civil society, very nearly its antithesis, that had risen up and brought down the Wall. The real binary then was: civil society versus top-down authoritarianism – and framed that way, our situation didn't look quite as good as Washington and the media then made out.

Nevertheless, for a decade afterward, it wasn't that easy to argue with the logic of capitalism's triumph, since even China was making a beeline for a market economy and, in the process, doing an especially good job of proving that capitalism and democracy were separate phenomena. It was also the decade of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the first of a series of broad international treaties meant to secure the terms of corporate power for a long time to come.

Its implementation on January 1, 1994, prompted the Zapatistas, the indigenous peasants of southern Mexico's jungle, to rise up against the treaty, which promised – and has now delivered – a grim new chapter in the deprivation and dispossession of Mexico's majority. Like the fall of the Berlin Wall, the rise of the Zapatistas came as a great shock.

### **The sucking sound and the turning tide**

Few remember how dissent against NAFTA was dismissed and even mocked in the era when the treaty was debated, signed, and ratified. In his debate with Bill Clinton and the elder George Bush during the 1992 presidential campaign, Ross Perot was ignored when he said, "We have got to stop sending jobs overseas." He was ridiculed for describing the "giant sucking sound" of those jobs heading south. Which, of course, they did – and then on to China in a financial "race to the bottom," while cheap corn raised by Midwestern agribusiness also went south where it bankrupted Mexico's small farmers.

Cheap food, cheap labor, cheap products turned out to be very, very expensive for the majority of us. It's a sign of how much things have changed that Hillary Clinton felt compelled to lie in last year's presidential campaign, claiming she had long been against NAFTA. In that, she was just a weathervane for changing times. After all, in the decade since Seattle, most of South America liberated itself not just from a legacy of American-supported dictators and death squads, but from the economic programs those instruments existed to enforce.

Venezuela lent Argentina enough money to pay off its debts to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), that earlier instrument for imposing free-market ideology and corporate profit. Various other countries did the same, and the continent largely freed itself from the imposition of neoliberal policies that mainly benefited Washington and international corporations. The IMF was so impoverished by Latin American divestment – which went from 80% of its loans to about 1% – that it's been reduced to selling off its gold reserves. The World Bank is doing well only by comparison. By 2005, the tide had clearly turned, and the power of these institutions and of the so-called Washington Consensus that went with them was on the wane.

That tide had just begun to turn 10 years

ago, when New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman referred to the people in the streets of Seattle as “a Noah’s ark of flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade unions and yuppies looking for their 1960’s fix.” He charged, “What’s crazy is that the protesters want the W.T.O. to become precisely what they accuse it of already being – a global government. They want it to set more rules – their rules, which would impose our labor and environmental standards on everyone else.”

Nice though our labor and environmental standards might have been elsewhere too, most of us didn’t want the WTO to do anything or to have any power. As the Direct Action Network organizing leaflet from August 1999 put it, the WTO’s “overall goal is to eliminate ‘trade barriers,’ frequently including labor laws, public health regulations, and environmental protection measures.”

That day in Seattle a crane dangled a pair of gigantic banners shaped like arrows: the first, inscribed “Democracy,” pointed one way; the second, labeled “WTO,” pointed the other. The leaflet and banners were pieces of a carefully organized resistance, and it’s important to remember that events like the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia 20 years ago or the shutdown of the WTO weren’t just spontaneous uprisings; they were the fruit of long toil. While the right and too many American media outlets like to remember a fictitious Seattle that was nothing but a cauldron of activist violence (while ignoring serious police violence), too many on the left wanted to think of it as a miraculous convergence rather than the result of careful coalition-building, strategizing, outreach, and all the usual labors.

### **Straying far from the blueprint for our ere**

In the twenty-first century, free-trade agreements came down with their own version of swine flu, a disease likely generated on a gigantic Smithfield Farms hog-

raising operation in Veracruz, Mexico, and nicknamed the NAFTA flu. NAFTA itself has been widely reviled. Presidential candidate Manuel Lopez Obrador campaigned in Mexico’s 2006 election on promises to renegotiate it; Hillary disowned it. The plan for a hemisphere-wide Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was met with massive opposition in Miami in 2003. It crashed and burned in Argentina in 2005 and has since been abandoned.

Latin America went its own way while the Bush Administration locked its attention on the Middle East. Indigenous peoples in Ecuador and Bolivia had a particularly rousing set of victories, while the people of Cochabamba, Bolivia, astonishingly, defeated U.S.-based Bechtel Corporation’s privatization of their water, and Ecuadorans are suing Chevron for environmental devastation in what could be the biggest corporate settlement in history – \$27 billion.

Meanwhile, the WTO lurched from one meeting to another, safe in the Doha round from pesky protesters, if not from the dissent of developing nations. It was again besieged by activists in 2003 in Cancún, Mexico – in scale and impact another Seattle – and then further battered in 2005 in Hong Kong. The next ministerial conference of the WTO actually convened in Geneva on November 30th, a decade to the day since the Seattle shutdown, still attempting to resolve issues that arose in Doha. Of course, in the meantime, sneakier bilateral trade agreements have taken the place of big multilateral ones, but this has hardly been the triumphant era predicted a decade earlier. Even Iraq hardly proved the hog trough the big oil and contracting corporations had anticipated.

In fact, for the corporations nothing much has turned out as planned. Capitalism itself failed a little more than a year ago. Or rather the bizarrely rigged corporate-run market economies that determine at least some portion of nearly everyone’s life on Earth imploded in a frenzy of dereg-

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ulated fecklessness and weirdly disassociative procedures. Then, they were propped up by governments in a way that made the phrase “socialism for the rich” truer than ever. For a while, the same business newspapers that had celebrated capitalism’s triumph in 1999 were proclaiming “the end of American capitalism as we knew it” and the “collapse of finance.”

It was as though the world economy had been a car driven by a drunk. Even if we have now let that drunk back behind the wheel, at least his credibility and the logic of what he claimed to be doing have been irreparably harmed. On the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, *Time* magazine’s cover story was: “Why Main Street Hates Wall Street” and it told readers in its opening passage that they should be furious. The fall of Wall Street, you could call it, if you want to hear the echo from Berlin.

Oil-price hikes, the misadventures in turning food into biofuels, and economic meltdowns have had other consequences. Michael Pollan wrote in the *New York Times* more than a year ago:

“In the past several months more than 30 nations have experienced food riots, and so far one government has fallen. Should high grain prices persist and shortages develop, you can expect to see the pendulum shift decisively away from free trade, at least in food. Nations that opened their markets to the global flood of cheap grain (under pressure from previous administrations as well as the World Bank and the I.M.F.) lost so many farmers that they now find their ability to feed their own populations hinges on decisions made in Washington... and on Wall Street. They will now rush to rebuild their own agricultural sectors and then seek to protect them by erecting trade barriers. Not only the Doha round, but the whole cause of free trade in agriculture is probably dead...”

Another death knell for the sunny corporate vision of globalization had nothing to do with ideology; it was about oil, since

the more it cost to ship things around the world the less financial sense it made to do so. As the *New York Times* put it this August: “Cheap oil, the lubricant of quick, inexpensive transportation links across the world, may not return anytime soon, upsetting the logic of diffuse global supply chains that treat geography as a footnote in the pursuit of lower wages. Rising concern about global warming, the reaction against lost jobs in rich countries, worries about food safety and security, and the collapse of world trade talks in Geneva last week also signal that political and environmental concerns may make the calculus of globalization far more complex.”

The passages cited above came from the *New York Times*, not the *Nation* or *Mother Jones*. Which is to say that if communism failed 20 years ago, then capitalism staggered 10 years ago in Seattle, and fell to its knees a year ago. The crises of petroleum and food costs only augment this reality. But the crisis of climate change matters more than all the rest.

### **Futures that work**

There are endless questions and conundrums about the largely unforeseen situation in which we now find ourselves, all six billion of us. One of them is: if capitalism and communism both failed, what’s the alternative? The big tent of subversions and traditions called the left hasn’t, in recent times, done a very good job of providing pictures of the possibilities available to us. Still, perhaps the answer to what the political and social alternatives might be will prove very close to what a sustainable world in the face of climate change might look like: small, local, smart, flexible economies and technologies, democracy as direct as possible, an elimination of excess wealth as part of a leveling that might also eliminate dire poverty.

Some of our hope for the future has to be that, one day, the ecological and the economic can be aligned so that, among other things, petroleum and coal become

increasingly expensive, as well as increasingly offensive, ways to run our machines. Will we be creative enough to embrace change before crashing systems and wild weather force change on us in the form of an unbearable crisis? Decisions about the nature of that change to come must be made by the citizenry, which seems to be fairly willing to face change when it gets its facts straight, rather than by wealthier nation-states and their leaders who seem, at this juncture, more interested in protecting business than life on Earth.

To survive the coming era, we need to re-imagine what constitutes wealth and well-being and what constitutes poverty. This doesn't mean telling the destitute not to hope for decent housing, adequate food, and some chance at education, as well as some pleasures and power. It means paring back on the mad consumption machine that has been the engine of the global economy, even though what it produces is often enough entirely distinct from what's actually needed. American life as it is now lived is poor in security, confidence, connectedness, agency, contemplation, calm, leisure, and other things that you aren't going to buy at Wal-Mart, or at Neiman Marcus for that matter. If we can see what's poor about the way we are, we can see what would be enriching rather than impoverishing about change.

Anniversaries of a whole host of revolutions seem to fall in years ending in nine – from 1789 in France to 1959 in Cuba and 1979 in Nicaragua. And then, in our calendar of nines, there was the fall of the Wall and the Battle of Seattle. The “revolution” that got us into this era of climate change, however, can't be dated that way. It was the industrial revolution, a gradual shift to an era of mechanization made possible by, and paralleled by, the rise of fossil-fuel consumption. We can't, and shouldn't, undo this revolution, but we need to reject some of its premises and recognize some of its costs, including alienation, degradation, and commodification.

We need a postindustrial revolution of appropriate technologies, both in the developed world and in the developing one, so that, for example, kerosene lanterns and wood-burning stoves will be replaced not by conventional appliances but by elegant solar technologies.

There needs to be another revolution in addition to these, one that finishes decolonizing the world so that Europe and the United States are no longer using the lion's share of resources and emitting the lion's share of carbon per capita. The WTO, the IMF, and other instruments of neoliberalism existed to keep that world-as-it-was going; the revolt in Seattle was against their ideology as well as their impact, and the decade-old graffiti that said, “We are winning,” had a point.

The “we” that could win and needs to win in the climate change wars isn't the United States itself. As Bill McKibben recently wrote of President Obama, “The announcement yesterday from the APEC meeting in Singapore that next month's Copenhagen climate talks will be nothing more than a glorified talking session makes it clear that he has, at least for now, punted on the hard questions around climate. The world won't be able to get started on solving our climate problem, and the obstacle is – as it has been for the last two decades – the United States.” The citizens of the U.S. need to revolt, again, against their nation's failure of vision and responsibility, in solidarity with the rest of the people of the world, and the animals, and the plants, and the coral reefs, and the coastlines, and the rivers, the glaciers, the ice caps, and the weather as we now know it, or once knew it.

Everything is going to change either as runaway climate change takes hold, with its concomitant destruction and suffering, or because a set of programs will be embraced that forestall the worst and return our planet to an atmospheric carbon level of 350 parts per million, now considered the necessary standard to avoid environmental

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catastrophe. We're already at 390 parts per million. Unfortunately, a lot of the nations in the key Copenhagen negotiations have fixed on an outdated notion that the world as we know it can survive at 450 parts per million, which would conveniently mean that relatively moderate adjustments are needed.

Remembering how dramatically – and unexpectedly – things have changed in the recent past is part of the toolbox for making a deeper, far more necessary change possible. Surely, the extraordinary power of ordinary people in Berlin and Seattle

provides us with the kinds of history lessons, the riches we need, to start learning to count. **CT**

*Rebecca Solnit is the author of "A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster," and co-author with her brother David of "The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle," a short anthology looking at how that watershed event has been misrepresented and reproducing some of the original documents. This essay originally appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)*

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# One wall's gone, but another still stands

While the West celebrated the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, they ignored another wall that stands as a global symbol of 21st Century repression, writes **David Pratt**

**I**n writing this, I'm bracing myself for being called an anti-Semite, an appeaser of terrorists and propagandist for the Palestinian cause.

I'm none of those things. I say this simply because these days, it seems, anyone who dares criticise the policies of the Israeli government leaves themselves open to such accusations.

The compulsion to write something that would leave me prone to such an attack was instigated by watching Berlin's champagne and fireworks celebrations commemorating the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Wall on November 9.

How strange it must be, I thought, for any Palestinian in the village of Abu Dis, sitting before a TV screen looking on as the world indulges in rapturous back-slapping over the restoration of freedom and human rights that came with the passing of the wall.

I mention Abu Dis not because it's special, but simply because I know it well, having spent some time there over the years. Indeed, I might just as easily have named umpteen other Palestinian communities cut off behind the concrete wall and fence built by Israel that stands twice as high and runs four times as long as its infamous Berlin predecessor.

What was amazing about the Berlin jamboree – aside from the toppling dominoes – was that in the days leading up to and during

the celebrations, scant mention was made of Israel's illegal "separation wall" which today, like its bygone equivalent, stands as a global symbol of repression. Why, on this grand occasion marking the end of the Berlin Wall, was there not more reflection or objection to the injustice caused by its contemporary counterpart?

Perhaps, it is because the word apartheid is something the world would prefer to forget, and to which Israel itself takes grave exception. Apartheid, after all, is something of a historical embarrassment, even if its existence and enforcement – whatever Israel might say – shamefully continues today for millions of Palestinians corralled in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 15 years after its demise in South Africa.

But there is another, altogether more worrying, reason for our collective reticence over Israel's shameful policy of closure and containment of the Palestinian people. It has to do with the way the world becomes cowed whenever the need arises to confront this "democratic" state over policies that fly in the face of international law and human rights conventions.

Frankly, I can almost understand this reluctance to criticise Israel, given the relentless, uncompromising and intimidating response the Jewish state invokes whenever it is challenged or questioned. Look no further, for example, than Jerusalem's reaction

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**If the Pentagon tells him to bomb a city he has never heard of and has no reason to bomb, killing people who pose no threat to him, he will. He feels no individual responsibility for atrocious behavior ordered from above**

to last month's Goldstone Report findings on the recent war in Gaza. Alternatively, ask any individual who has had the audacity to make public their objections to Israel's wall or human rights violations, only to find themselves on the receiving end of an often vitriolic Zionist lobby.

One of the favourite responses of these Zionist cadres is to denounce any critic as an anti-Semite, or if that doesn't work, an appeaser of terrorists. I remember well the first time I dared use the word apartheid in the context of Israel's wall.

In pointing out in an article that the Hebrew word "hafrada", which means "separation", was often now used as a virtual catch-all term for an apartheid existence between Israelis and Palestinians, I was inundated with some very nasty email correspondence.

### **Bantustan plan**

How many of those who sent these emails, I wonder, would have known that as far back as 1999, Ariel Sharon, then Israel's Foreign Minister, spoke openly about the proposed wall, referring to it as "the Bantustan plan", saying that the South African apartheid model offered the most appropriate solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? How many also would have known that it was one of Israel's own prominent military historians, Professor Martin van Creveld, of the Hebrew University, who was first to propose a wall round the West Bank, and who drew his inspiration for that same proposal from the Berlin Wall, after spending a year's sabbatical in Germany in 1980-81?

"If I could, I would build a concrete wall so tall that even birds could not fly over it, and above all, so the people cannot look each other in the face – complete separation," Van Creveld is quoted as saying in an article, some years before Mr Sharon, when Israeli Prime Minister, took his idea to heart and made the wall a bitter reality for those Palestinians who now live in its shadow.

Of course, whenever questions about the legality of the wall are raised, Israel invari-

ably responds with the same answer: "It stops the bombers and that's all that matters."

But how can Israel insist on calling it a "security wall" when instead of just separating Israel from the West Bank, it separates Arab from Arab? Indeed, how could a people whose history is full of terrible ghettos now be building one themselves?

For Israelis such as these, there is simply no debate to be had. As far as they are concerned, the crushing effects of the wall on the lives of millions of Palestinians is a small price to pay for the relative – if somewhat imaginary – guarantee of their own personal security.

But to call it this way makes for a convenient defence of a policy they also know is little more than a land grab and indefensible in terms of international law.

"If you want security for your house, you build the wall in your own garden, not in your neighbour's," I remember Hassan Akramawi, a Palestinian shopkeeper, telling me near Abu Dis, where the wall had cut his business off from the village customers who gave him a meagre income.

For anyone who has never seen the wall, it's hard to overemphasise the sheer injustice of this concrete scar that gouges its way across olive orchards, family homes, grazing areas, places of work, schools and anything else that, frankly, the state of Israel has decided to confiscate. Its sheer physical size bears down when you are near it.

The double standards displayed by many world leaders keen to add their ringing endorsement to the inhuman and intolerant rule the Berlin Wall represented, while remaining steadfastly mute on Israel's present-day incarnation, is shaming to them all. As one old Palestinian man, a resident of Abu Dis, once put it to me succinctly: "Where is the world? Where is the world?" **CT**

*David Pratt is foreign editor of the Scottish Sunday Herald, where this report was originally published. He is author of "Intifada: The Long day Of Rage"*

# Hey, Obama, hands off Muhammad Ali

Barack Obama has a photo of Muhammad Ali hanging over his desk. Perhaps he should heed Ali's words, writes **Dave Zirin**

**O**n November 19th, President Barack Obama wrote a stirring tribute in *USA Today* to the most famous draft resister in US history, Muhammad Ali.

On December 1, Obama spoke at West Point, calling for an increase of 30,000 troops into Afghanistan, with a speech that recalled the worst shadings of George W. Bush's "war on terror."

On November 19th, Obama wrote about why Ali's photo hangs over his desk, praising "The Greatest" for "his unique ability to summon extraordinary strength and courage in the face of adversity, to navigate the storm and never lose his way."

On December 1, Obama showed neither courage nor strength but the worst kind of imperial arrogance. He asserted America's right to go into a deeply impoverished country that – from Alexander the Great to the USSR to today – has made clear to the world's empires that it wants to be left the hell alone.

On December 1, Obama summoned the spectre of 9/11 and said, "It is easy to forget that when this war began, we were united—bound together by the fresh memory of a horrific attack, and by the determination to defend our homeland and the values we hold dear." He didn't mention how many innocent Afghans had already died in eight years of "horrific attacks" on their home-

land or how many would die in the months ahead, defending their own homeland.

On November 19th, Obama praised Ali as "a force for reconciliation and peace around the world."

On December 1 the Nobel Peace Prize winner, reconciled himself to war.

Would that Muhammad Ali still had his voice. Would that Parkinson's disease and dementia had not robbed us of his razor-sharp tongue.

Today, Ali has been described as "America's only living saint." But like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, both postage stamps before people, Ali has had his political teeth extracted.

But in a time when billions go to war and prisons while 50% of children will be on food stamps for the coming year, we can't afford Ali, the harmless icon. Maybe Muhammad Ali has been robbed of speech, but I think we can safely guess what the Champ would say in the face of Obama's war. We can safely guess, because he said it perfectly four decades ago:

*"Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights? No, I'm not going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor na-*

**Maybe Muhammad Ali has been robbed of speech, but I think we can safely guess what the Champ would say in the face of Obama's war. We can safely guess, because he said it perfectly four decades ago**

## ROPE A DOPE

**We need to reclaim Ali from warmongers who would use his image to sell a war that will create more orphans than peace**

*tion simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over. This is the day when such evils must come to an end. I have been warned that to take such a stand would cost me millions of dollars. But I have said it once and I will say it again. The real enemy of my people is here..... If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to 22 million of my people, they wouldn't have to draft me, I'd join tomorrow. I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So I'll go to jail, so what? We've been in jail for 400 years."*

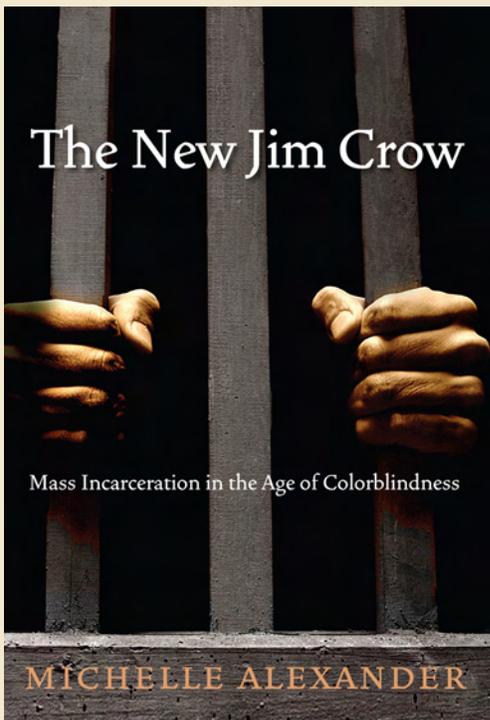
Replace Vietnam with Afghanistan and it's a message Barack Obama and our troops need to hear. But we shouldn't wait for some celebrity or athlete to make that statement for us. Muhammad Ali may have helped shape the 1960s, but those years of

resistance also shaped him. We need to rebuild the movement against war. We need to revive the real Muhammad Ali to inspire draft resisters of the future. We need to reclaim Ali from warmongers who would use his image to sell a war that will create more orphans than peace.

This is the struggle of our lives and we have the Nobel-minted President of the United States on the other side of the barricades. Barack Obama can have the fawning media, the generals, the RNC, and the liberal apologists on his side. But he can't have the Champ. Remove that poster from your wall Mr. President. Your Ali privileges have been revoked. **CT**

*Dave Zirin is the author of "A People's History of Sports in the United States" (The New Press)*

**A bold and innovative argument that mass incarceration amounts to a devastating system of racial control**



## THE NEW JIM CROW

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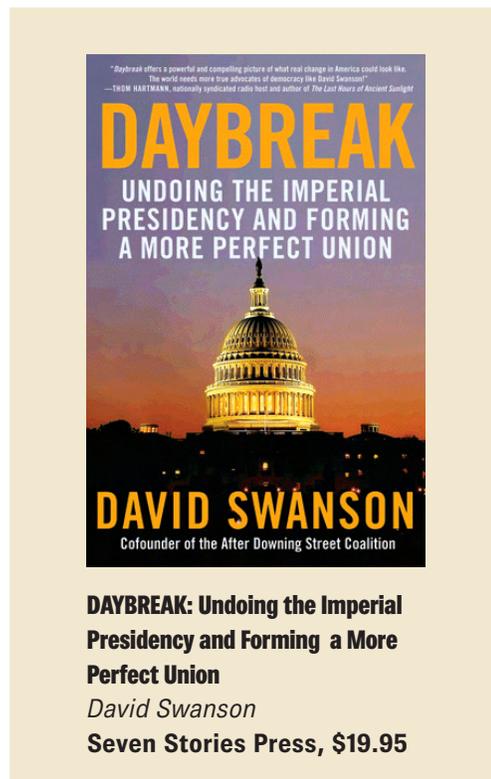


# The power of judiciary

Chapter Four of the new book, *Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union* by **David Swanson**, published by Seven Stories Press

**W**e have already seen that Bush and Cheney bestowed upon the presidency the power to write laws and to violate laws when the president is actually only supposed to have the power to enforce laws. So, let's talk now about law enforcement. Bush and Cheney did make good use of the government's law enforcement agencies, including the Department of Justice – but they used them for illegal and partisan purposes. They used the NSA and the FBI to illegally spy. They used the CIA and the military to illegally detain, torture, and murder. And they established a new court system for “enemy combatants” that was separate from the judicial branch of our government, and that had not been created by Congress.

You can call the executive power “unitary” as Dick Cheney did with some irony, as a vice president sharing heartily in the supposedly unitary power. You could call the executive power multitudinous, or beauteous, or miraculous. But no matter what you call it, you can't change the fact that it indisputably does not include rendition power or torture power or any of the other criminal powers seized by Bush and Cheney. (Rendition began with President Bill Clinton, but was greatly expanded by Bush, which is what presidents tend to do with powers they've been handed by their



Bush and Cheney did make good use of the government's law enforcement agencies, including the Department of Justice – but they used them for illegal and partisan purposes. They used the NSA and the FBI to illegally spy. They used the CIA and the military to illegally detain, torture, and murder

predecessors. In fact, Obama announced that he would continue rendition but not use it for torture – he would not use “extraordinary rendition.” Once used openly by multiple presidents and left unchallenged, rendition, like other abuses, becomes ordinary.)

The power to decide to kidnap people, disappear them, hang them by their wrists, electroshock their genitals, and hide them

**Obama's White House supported former Bush aide Karl Rove's claim of "executive privilege" and negotiated partial compliance by Rove with a subpoena from the House Judiciary Committee, openly arguing that this was appropriate in order to maintain presidential power**

away from the world indefinitely simply does not exist in the Constitution. It did exist until 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment banned slavery. But it existed as a personal, nongovernmental power for any president of the land of the free who happened to own a bunch of human beings (the same power any Congress member or private citizen had). It never existed at all as part of the executive power of the president in his official capacity, as something on which he might openly or secretly spend public funds. To do so would have been, and still is, in violation of the Fourth through Eighth Amendments, which were ratified as the heart of the Bill of Rights (for non-slaves) in 1791.

Bush and his Attorney General Alberto Gonzales abused the Justice Department for political ends. The routine hiring and firing of career employees was, by the department's own admission, illegally based on loyalty to the Republican Party. The Department of Justice even fired nine US Attorneys (top federal prosecutors) in December 2006 for apparently partisan reasons. The department's own Inspector General called the process "arbitrary" and "fundamentally flawed," and said that it "raised doubts about the integrity of Department prosecution decisions." Some of the fired prosecutors had been investigating Republicans. Others had been refusing to prosecute particular targeted Democrats or to pursue the prosecution of nonexistent crimes that were part of Republican talking points, primarily the crime of "voter fraud." (While election fraud, meaning the wholesale manipulation of vote counts, does occur, instances of lone individuals misrepresenting themselves in order to illegally cast a single vote are few and far between – almost nonexistent, though we've been told they occur in epidemic volume.)

Given this level of corruption in the Justice Department, it was not surprising that when, in 2007 and 2008, Congress asked it to enforce subpoenas and contempt citations against its own employees and par-

tisan allies, the Justice Department refused. It was slightly more surprising when in February 2009 the new Justice Department refused to enforce some of the same subpoenas then reissued by Congress. Obama's White House supported former Bush aide Karl Rove's claim of "executive privilege" and negotiated partial compliance by Rove with a subpoena from the House Judiciary Committee, openly arguing that this was appropriate in order to maintain presidential power.

The complete corruption of the Department of Justice meant that the Bush White House could engage in any criminal behavior it chose without fear of prosecution. In fact, Bush engaged in illegal partisan activities in the White House as well as the Department of Justice. He routinely used federal resources for partisan politics by orchestrating partisan political events during work hours at federal government facilities involving federal government employees in violation of the Hatch Act, which bars federal officials from partisan political activity while on the job. Bush's top adviser Karl Rove worked on electoral politics out of the White House at taxpayer expense and led an "asset deployment" team that influenced the use of government resources for the purpose of electing President Bush and other Republican politicians. Among these resources were cabinet secretaries, who were deployed to key media markets to promote the Republican electoral agenda. The White House Office of Political Affairs, headed by Rove, presented its partisan political information during meetings held by other government departments. Up through the 2008 election of Obama, Democrats in Congress favored eliminating the White House Office of Political Affairs. After the election, they went silent.

The Cheney-Bush gang found plenty of other laws to violate as well.

Prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001, not just after, President Bush authorized the NSA to violate the Fourth Amendment and the Foreign Intelligence Service Act of

1978 (FISA) by spying on Americans without court warrants to do so, and without even the very easily and retroactively obtained warrants of the FISA Court. For five years, Bush lied to the public and most of Congress about this. Some key members of Congress of both parties were informed and remained criminally silent. Bush repeatedly made clear his awareness of the law and falsely claimed to be abiding by it. For example, at a White House press conference on April 20, 2004, Bush said:

“Now, by the way, any time you hear the United States government talking about wiretap, it requires – a wiretap requires a court order. Nothing has changed, by the way. When we’re talking about chasing down terrorists, we’re talking about getting a court order before we do so.”

The *New York Times* finally broke the story in 2005, having sat on it for over a year because it might have influenced voters in the 2004 election. What a disaster it would have been for voters to be influenced by knowledge of what their government was actually doing! The *New York Times* only published the story when it did because the reporter, James Risen, was about to tell it in his book *State of War*. From that point forward, Bush shifted from denying he was engaged in warrantless spying to insisting that he had every right to engage in warrantless spying, and that questioning that fact amounted to putting Americans’ lives in danger. In a radio address on December 17, 2005, Bush said, “I have reauthorized this program more than thirty times since the September 11 attacks, and I intend to do so for as long as our nation faces a continuing threat from al-Qaeda and related groups. The NSA’s activities under this authorization are thoroughly reviewed by the Justice Department and NSA’s top legal officials, including NSA’s general counsel and inspector general.”

Bush falsely implied in the above statement that the program had begun after the September 11 attacks. And he falsely implied that he was obeying the law by in-

dicating that lawyers working for him had obligingly approved of his crime. Yet even this pretense of legality was not entirely accurate. On March 10, 2004, Attorney General John Ashcroft had refused to authorize the entire warrantless spying program or some aspect thereof, summoning the strength to lift his head from a hospital bed to do so when White House Counsel (later to become Attorney General) Alberto Gonzales and Bush’s chief of staff Andrew Card Jr. had tried to take advantage of Ashcroft’s condition. Top members of the Justice Department threatened mass resignation until the programs were altered in some unknown way. Perhaps Bush, Card, and Gonzales had proposed eavesdropping on Americans domestically without any pretense of focusing on foreign communications, or eavesdropping on Congress or courts or political enemies or reporters. Perhaps they wanted to plant bugs in church confessionals. Who knows. It was something that even Ashcroft in his hospital bed couldn’t bring himself to approve, but that his successor Gonzales favored.

At a December 19, 2005 press conference Bush claimed the right to violate the law in as explicit a manner as we have heard from a president since former President Nixon had claimed that anything a president did was legal. Bush’s mangling of the English language does not prevent the clear understanding that he was claiming the right to use the FISA court when he chose, and to ignore it when he saw fit:

“We use FISA still – you’re referring to the FISA court in your question – of course, we use FISAs. But FISA is for long-term monitoring. What is needed in order to protect the American people is the ability to move quickly to detect. Now, having suggested this idea, I then, obviously, went to the question, is it legal to do so? I am – I swore to uphold the laws. Do I have the legal authority to do this? And the answer is, absolutely. As I mentioned in my remarks, the legal authority is derived from the Constitution, as well as the authorization of

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**Contrary to claims made by Bush, Cheney, and the gang, the spying programs they established illegally spied on domestic communications within the United States, not just communications to or from individuals outside the countr**

force by the United States Congress.”

Remember that Authorization to Use Military Force, by which Congress had unconstitutionally transferred the power to declare war to the White House? Nowhere in it was there any authorization to violate FISA or the Fourth Amendment; in fact, Congress has no power to authorize the violation of the Fourth Amendment, and FISA explicitly establishes itself and two chapters of the federal criminal code as the “exclusive means by which electronic surveillance . . . and the interception of domestic wire, oral, and electronic communications may be conducted.” At a December 19, 2005 press briefing, Attorney General Gonzales admitted that the nature of the surveillance being done was so far removed from what FISA could approve (or perhaps from what the public would ever tolerate) that FISA could not even be amended to allow it. He said, “We have had discussions with Congress in the past – certain members of Congress – as to whether or not FISA could be amended to allow us to adequately deal with this kind of threat, and we were advised that that would be difficult, if not impossible.”

In fact, contrary to claims made by Bush, Cheney, and the gang, the spying programs they established illegally spied on domestic communications within the United States, not just communications to or from individuals outside the country. Mark Klein, a retired AT&T communications technician, submitted an affidavit in support of a lawsuit against AT&T filed by the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Klein testified in 2006 that in 2003 he had connected a “splitter” that sent a copy of all Internet traffic and phone calls to a secure room that was operated by the NSA in the San Francisco office of AT&T. Klein testified that he had been told by a coworker that similar rooms were being constructed in other cities, including Seattle, San Jose, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

Bush violated the Stored Communications Act of 1986 and the Telecommunica-

tions Act of 1996 by creating a huge database drawn from the private telephone calls and e-mails of American citizens and provided, at the Bush administration’s request, by major telecommunications companies, including AT&T, Verizon, and Bell South. In 2007 we learned that in early 2001, prior to the September 11 attacks, Joseph Nacchio, the CEO of Qwest, had rejected as illegal a request from the NSA to turn over customer records of phone calls, e-mails and other Internet activity.

On August 17, 2006, the United States District Court in Detroit ruled in *ACLU v. NSA* that the Bush-Cheney spying programs violated the Fourth Amendment and FISA. In July 2007, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed the case without ruling on its merits. In fact, the appeals court ruled only that the plaintiffs had no standing to sue because they couldn’t be certain they’d been spied upon, and they couldn’t be certain they’d been spied upon because the spying had been done in secret. Thus did all three branches of government become complicit in the removal of the Fourth Amendment from our Constitution.

We don’t, of course, know the full extent or nature of the spying, but we know that Bush knowingly violated FISA on a grand scale, and that FISA carries a potential penalty of five years in prison for each violation. And we have had hints at the things we don’t know. In 2007 we learned that Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell had written to Senator Arlen Specter admitting that an executive order from Bush in 2001 had authorized a series of secret surveillance activities that included undisclosed activities beyond the warrantless surveillance of e-mails and phone calls that Bush had confirmed in December 2005.

On July 1, 2007, I broke the story on my After Downing Street blog that for the first time one of the operators who had engaged in unconstitutional spying at the NSA was willing to talk about it. Adrienne Kinne had eavesdropped on phone calls to the United

States from soldiers, aid workers, and journalists in Iraq. And she revealed evidence of more crimes than just the spying. Kinne described an incident just prior to the invasion of Iraq in which a fax had come into her office at Fort Gordon in Georgia that purported to provide information on the location of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. The fax came from the Iraqi National Congress, a group opposed to Saddam Hussein and favoring an invasion. The fax contained types of information that required that it be translated and transmitted to President Bush within fifteen minutes. But Kinne had been eavesdropping on two nongovernmental aid workers driving in Iraq who were panicked and trying to find safety before the bombs dropped. She focused on trying to protect them, and was reprimanded for the delay in translating the fax. She then challenged her officer in charge, Warrant Officer John Berry, on the credibility of the fax, and he told her that it was not her place or his to challenge such things. None of the other twenty or so people in the unit questioned anything, Kinne said. She dated this incident to the period just before the official invasion of Iraq, or possibly just after. She said that because the US engaged in so much bombing prior to the official invasion, she could not recall for sure. As far as I know, *Wired* is the only media outlet that followed up on this particular part of Kinne's story. Many of the people Kinne spied on, including Americans, were journalists. Some were staying at a hotel in Baghdad that later showed up on a list of targets. Kinne said she expressed concerns to her officer in charge, letting him know that the military should be made aware of the situation, or that the journalists should be warned to move to another location. Kinne said that Berry brushed her off. He was, she said, "completely behind the invasion of Iraq. He told us repeatedly that we needed to bomb those barbarians back to kingdom come." Berry was later promoted to Chief Warrant Officer. As far as I know, *Wired* and Democracy Now! were the only

media outlets that followed up on this part of the story, and it took Democracy Now! Until May 13, 2008, to do so.

On May 19, 2008, I broke the story of the second NSA operator willing to discuss what he'd done. David Murfee Faulk, who had also been stationed at Fort Gordon, said that in May 2004 he found an extremely large text file containing grid coordinates for alleged chemical weapons sites in Iraq. Faulk said he showed it to his supervisor, who had been surprised. But the supervisor was not surprised that the file existed, only that it had not been deleted. The supervisor said he had believed all such files had been deleted. He claimed that US Special Forces had gone to the locations and found nothing. That's what usually happens, Faulk's supervisor told him, when you get a tip from the Israelis. "Four out of five times it's complete and total bullshit." I asked veteran CIA analyst RayMcGovern what he made of this, and he told me in an e-mail that there was "no such thing as a 'friendly' intelligence service. Reporting from liaison services always needs to be taken with utmost reserve. That goes in spades for what comes from the Israelis, the more so since they have unique, yes, unique, access to the White House and Pentagon, and are thus able to circumvent the intelligence bureaucracy set up to vet and evaluate raw intelligence and prevent unverified and/or tendentious 'intelligence' from reaching senior officials, lest they be misled."

As far as I know, no other media outlet has ever, to this day, followed up on this aspect of Faulk's story. But on October 9, 2008, ABC News ran a story on both Kinne and Faulk. ABC called the story "exclusive" despite being years behind the curve, ignored the evidence related to the war, and focused on the fact that Faulk and others had listened in on "phone sex" between US soldiers and their spouses. While Kinne had tried to get Congress to pay attention to her since before I'd first reported her story, the first sign of interest came from a handful of senators and House members

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**Between 2000 and 2008, the United States became (at least more directly and openly than in the past) a country whose government kidnaps people, Americans and others, at home and abroad; locks them up without charge or due process, and without access to the outside world; and tortures them or sends them to foreign allies to be tortured.**

just after the ABC ‘exclusive,’ and vanished again as the story quickly faded from view.

On June 9, 2008, Congressman Kucinich introduced thirty-five articles of impeachment against Bush, including two covering the unconstitutional spying. During the presidential election primaries, Obama defeated Senator Hillary Clinton, aided in some measure by his unequivocal promise to oppose and to filibuster against any bill that would grant immunity to the telecom companies for their illegal spying. When a bill came before the House and Senate in July 2008 granting civil immunity to the telecoms, Obama’s supporters gathered on his website, creating the largest self-organized group of Obama activists, with the goal of pushing Obama to keep his word. Instead he voted for the bill, stating, [The FISA bill] also firmly reestablishes basic judicial oversight over all domestic surveillance in the future. It does, however, grant retroactive immunity, and I will work in the Senate to remove this provision so that we can seek full accountability for past offenses.

Not only should that “modernization” act be repealed, but the original Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act should be completely repealed as well. While violating FISA constitutes a troubling lawlessness, the law itself provides a rubber stamp rather than serious judicial oversight. FISA and the PATRIOT Act should be repealed as violations of our Bill of Rights, and replaced with strict laws in defense of our rights. But violators of even the unconstitutionally loose standards of FISA must be prosecuted and imprisoned if rewriting laws are to have any meaning. In addition, we must compel Congress to compel the Obama administration to make public everything it knows about the crimes of Bush and Cheney in this and other areas. We must not fall into the foolish trap of believing that because we don’t know all the details, we don’t know crimes have been committed. Prosecutions should proceed without delay. But the full story should still be exposed, and simply having elected

a new president will not accomplish that. In November 2008, President-elect Obama scheduled a meeting with outgoing Vice President Dick Cheney to discuss secret programs that Cheney wanted to see continued. We don’t know what was discussed there. But by May 2009, President Obama had announced that he would continue to claim the power of indefinite detention without charge. On the rare occasions during the Cheney-Bush era that I appeared on corporate cable news shows and was asked what the president could possibly have done wrong, I always said he’s spied without warrants, detained without charges, tortured, and murdered. Sometimes I continued with a longer list, but I always started with those same ten words. Obviously I considered the spying without warrants to be the least of it. The other abuses were more severe and equally impeachable and prosecutable.

Between 2000 and 2008, the United States became (at least more directly and openly than in the past) a country whose government kidnaps people, Americans and others, at home and abroad; locks them up without charge or due process, and without access to the outside world; and tortures them or sends them to foreign allies to be tortured. The Fifth Amendment has been shredded without a word, while the Geneva Conventions – which, under Article VI of the Constitution, are the law of the land – were explicitly rejected by a decree from “The Decider” on February 7, 2002. Such decrees were typically signed by Bush when his subordinates got nervous about covering their asses, not when the crimes began. By February of 2002, the Bush administration was already shipping people from Afghanistan and around the world to prisons in Afghanistan and at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The rounding up of Muslims in the United States had begun immediately after September 11, 2001. So had the practice of “ghosting” prisoners: in violation of US law and the Geneva Conventions, Bush instructed the Depart-

ment of Justice and the US Department of Defense (DOD) to refuse to provide the identities or locations of detainees, despite requests from their attorneys, Congress, and the Red Cross. Bush claimed the right to detain foreigners and US citizens alike indefinitely, without charge or access to counsel. Several US citizens were held in solitary confinement in military briggs for months or years. At least 2,500 of those subjected to the Bush system of injustice were children under eighteen. That's how many children the United States told the United Nations it was holding as "enemy combatants" in May 2008, not counting children who had by then reached the age of eighteen while imprisoned.

Early in the move to what Cheney called "the dark side," the Bush gang chose to ask foreign allies to do its torturing. We, our US government, "renditioned" people to secret prisons in nations known to practice torture. Much of this was handled by the CIA, which has no legal authority to be involved in law enforcement – if that's even what this can be called. Torture and aiding or abetting torture is all illegal under US law and the Convention Against Torture (CAT), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Geneva Conventions, the US Bill of Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Once fully immersed in the dark side, our public employees and their contractors did more of the torturing themselves. Bush explicitly authorized it, and it became standard procedure at Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib Prison, other US detention sites in Iraq, and at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. Bush's lawyers, in this case, did not simply claim that Bush had the right to break the law. Instead they claimed that torture was not torture, redefining torture as the inflicting of pain akin to that accompanying "serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death." They went on to claim, however, that the president indeed had the right to engage in torture, even as thus redefined.

John Yoo of the Office of Legal Counsel famously claimed in 2006 that the president had the right to crush a child's testicles. Somehow that image doesn't strike me as a worthy replacement for the Statue of Liberty.

Bush's lawyers were wise to claim that he had the right to engage in torture even with torture having been redefined as indistinguishable from murder, because US military autopsy reports showed that dozens of prisoners had been tortured to death. In his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush announced, "To date we have arrested or otherwise dealt with many key commanders of al-Qaeda. . . . All told, more than 3,000 suspected terrorists have been arrested in many countries. . . . And many others have met a different fate. Let's put it this way: They are no longer a problem to the United States and our friends and allies. . . . We've got the terrorists on the run. We're keeping them on the run. One by one the terrorists are learning the meaning of American justice." The new meaning of American justice was the absence of a judicial system, and one by one American states, counties, and cities were learning it as well. The government unconstitutionally spied on peace activists, infiltrated organizations, charged Quakers with "terrorism," detained independent reporters without charges during major events, and even tortured. The Republican National Convention in Minneapolis / St. Paul in the summer of 2008 left behind allegations of all of these activities as well as videotape of police in riot gear randomly arresting peaceful citizens.

By declaring hundreds of detainees at Guantánamo Bay and elsewhere to be "enemy combatants" not subject to US law and not even subject to military law, but nonetheless potentially liable to the death penalty, Bush violated laws and the Constitution. He also replaced the judicial branch of our government with something of his own creation: military commissions, a justice system stripped of all justice. Unlike

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the legislative branch, the judicial branch appeared to take offense at its proposed replacement.

The judicial branch of our government did in cases stand up for the rule of law against the incredible abuses of the Bush-Cheney White House, as evidenced in the Supreme Court cases *Rasul v. Bush*, *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, and *Boumediene v. Bush*. In the 2004 *Rasul* case, the Supreme Court ruled that detainees at Guantánamo could challenge their detentions in US courts, detentions that had been imposed on them purely by the decree of the president. The *Hamdi* decision the same year came to the same conclusion, but only as applied to US citizens. In 2005, Congress gave Bush the Detainee Treatment Act, including the “McCain Amendment,” purporting to legalize presidential detentions and pseudo-trials and to provide legal protection to those involved in these crimes.

In the June 2006 *Hamdan* case the Supreme Court ruled that the president did not have the right to substitute “military commissions” for court trials, and was in fact bound by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions as well as the War Crimes Act of 1996. In October 2006, Congress gave the president the Military Commissions Act, including Section 7(e), which purported to allow the president to do what he wanted, justice be damned, and tossed out the right of habeas corpus. In the June 2008 *Boumediene* case the Supreme Court ruled that prisoners at Guantánamo had the right of habeas corpus, and that the denial of that right by the Military Commissions Act was unconstitutional. None of these rulings were unanimous, and the justices ruling against limitations on presidential power tended, ominously, to be the younger ones. The Bush Justice Department fought prisoners’ habeas petitions, and in April 2009 the Obama Justice Department placed a help wanted ad for lawyers who could do the same.

In December 2007, the *Boston Globe* asked candidate Obama, “Does the presi-

dent have inherent powers under the Constitution to conduct surveillance for national security purposes without judicial warrants, regardless of federal statutes?” Obama replied, “The Supreme Court has never held that the president has such powers. As president, I will follow existing law, and when it comes to US citizens and residents, I will only authorize surveillance for national security purposes consistent with FISA and other federal statutes.” But, as noted, Obama then voted for a bill granting immunity to telecom companies. He claimed at the time that he would work to remove that immunity and that the bill provided judicial oversight. Instead, during his first months as president, Obama’s Justice Department renewed and expanded upon Bush’s claims of “state secrets” in attempts to have court cases dismissed that sought accountability for warrantless spying and torture. Obama used the “state secrets” excuse to argue not only for keeping information out of court, but for dismissing cases entirely. His administration argued that under the PATRIOT Act the government had “sovereign immunity” and could not be sued for illegal spying unless it intentionally made public what it found. The new Justice Department also argued that a president should be able to declare anything classified and deny any court, even in closed session, the right to review it. These were all innovations that expanded presidential powers of secrecy and immunity.

That they were used to cover up the crimes of the previous administration, and that the new administration promised not to commit some of the same crimes, was good news, but the ability of future presidents to engage in such abuses undetected was being enhanced, not restrained. And the effort was quite aggressive; Obama’s White House even threatened to cut off intelligence sharing with the British government if it exposed past crimes. The *Boston Globe* asked further questions:

Q: Does the Constitution permit a president to detain US citizens without charges

as unlawful enemy combatants?

A: No. I reject the Bush administration's claim that the President has plenary authority under the Constitution to detain US citizens without charges as unlawful enemy combatants.

Q: If Congress prohibits a specific interrogation technique, can the president instruct his subordinates to employ that technique despite the statute?

A: No. The President is not above the law, and not entitled to use techniques that Congress has specifically banned as torture. We must send a message to the world that America is a nation of laws, and a nation that stands against torture. As President I will abide by statutory prohibitions for all US Government personnel and contractors.

Q: Is there any executive power the Bush administration has claimed or exercised that you think is unconstitutional?

A: I reject the view that the President may do whatever he deems necessary to protect national security, and that he may torture people in defiance of congressional enactments. I reject the use of signing statements to make extreme and implausible claims of presidential authority.

#### Some further points:

- The detention of American citizens, without access to counsel, fair procedure, or pursuant to judicial authorization, as enemy combatants is unconstitutional.

- Warrantless surveillance of American citizens, in defiance of FISA, is unlawful and unconstitutional.

- The violation of international treaties that have been ratified by the Senate, specifically the Geneva Conventions, was illegal (as the Supreme Court held) and a bad idea.

- The creation of military commissions without congressional authorization was unlawful (as the Supreme Court held at least in part, ruling that combat status review tribunals are no substitute for habeas corpus) and a bad idea.

These were encouraging answers from candidate Obama, especially regarding US citizens. But what about the other 95 percent of the people in the world? During the first weeks of his presidency, Obama made it clear that, at least for them, the rule of law would be optional. He would maintain the power to kidnap people and ship them across borders, as well as the power to detain people without charge indefinitely. While committing to not torturing, to closing secret CIA prisons, and to eventually closing the Guantánamo prison, Obama claimed the continued power of rendition and the power to detain people indefinitely outside any rule of law. He would simply do so in prisons other than the one at Guantánamo. Obama's Justice Department appealed a ruling that would have given prisoners at Bagram air base in Afghanistan the right to habeas corpus.

Fixing this mess will require that Congress repeal all legislation that has facilitated its creation, including the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005 and the Military Commissions Act of 2006. I'm grateful for the steps that have been taken, and I'm all in favor of Obama not torturing anyone. However, I oppose accepting the pretense that one president can order torture legal and the next order it illegal. If we accept that, then what is to prevent a future president declaring it legal again? Just after the election of 2008, a large coalition of well intended organizations called The Constitution Project released a report recommending solutions to a wide range of Bush-Cheney crimes and abuses. But most of the recommendations were addressed to President Obama, not to Congress. The policy positions were good ones, the understanding of power and deterrence weak.

Repealing and passing legislation will not be enough. Remember that when Congress redundantly re-banned torture, Bush used a signing statement to claim the right to torture anyway. Any future president will be aware of the privilege to ignore the law unless Bush, Cheney, and gang are prose-

**I oppose accepting the pretense that one president can order torture legal and the next order it illegal. If we accept that, then what is to prevent a future president declaring it legal again?**

Senator Russ Feingold also prepared a list of recommendations to the new president, but failed to include the one piece of advice I would have offered: remember that Congress makes the laws

cuted. Following the 2008 elections, groups like the ACLU, Human Rights First, People for the American Way, and many others published proposals to cease committing the crimes involved in detention and torture, but did not prominently propose prosecuting anyone guilty of the crimes. (By February 2009, most such groups were supporting prosecution but more loudly urging the creation of commissions, hearings, or investigations by Congress or a special body.) By April, the ACLU was strongly in favor of appointing a special prosecutor.

Senator Russ Feingold also prepared a list of recommendations to the new president, but failed to include the one piece of advice I would have offered: remember that Congress makes the laws. Senator Dianne Feinstein, who was expected to become, and did become, the new chair of the Intelligence Committee, planned to “introduce legislation that would require America’s intelligence agencies to follow the Army field manual in interrogations; to prohibit the use of contractors in interrogations; to grant the International Committee of the Red Cross access to detainees; and to close the Guantánamo Bay detention facility within one year,” according to her spokesman, Phil LaVelle. “If President Obama accomplishes these goals through executive action, then we won’t need to pursue them legislatively as well.” Obama so ordered, and Congress did not have to be troubled to act. Feinstein appeared to have difficulty thinking more than four years into the future.

If we were thinking ahead we would demand that Congress pass all appropriate legislation, whether or not the current president engages in the same abuses as others. We would work to amend the Constitution as needed to render possible future abus-

es unconstitutional. And we would give strength and meaning to existing laws by enforcing them. In February 2009, as Congress members and media pundits debated whether to turn a blind eye or set up a “truth commission” to mull over the past eight years, I drafted a short statement that over 180 human rights groups signed onto, including the Center for Constitutional Rights, the National Lawyers Guild, the Society of American Law Teachers, etc. The statement read in its entirety:

“We urge Attorney General Eric Holder to appoint a non-partisan independent Special Counsel to immediately commence a prosecutorial investigation into the most serious alleged crimes of former President George W. Bush, former Vice President Richard B. Cheney, the attorneys formerly employed by the Department of Justice whose memos sought to justify torture, and other former top officials of the Bush administration. Our laws, and treaties that under Article VI of our Constitution are the supreme law of the land, require the prosecution of crimes that strong evidence suggests these individuals have committed. Both the former president and the former vice president have confessed to authorizing a torture procedure that is illegal under our law and treaty obligations. The former president has confessed to violating the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

“We see no need for these prosecutions to be extraordinarily lengthy or costly, and no need to wait for the recommendations of a panel or “truth” commission when substantial evidence of the crimes is already in the public domain. We believe the most effective investigation can be conducted by a prosecutor, and we believe such an investigation should begin immediately.” **CT**

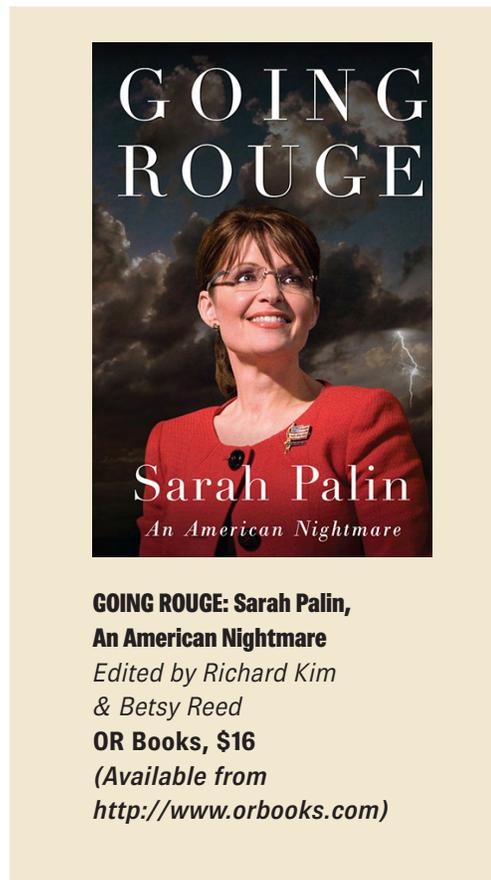


# Sarah Palin: view from the left

The introduction to *Going Rouge: Sarah Palin, An American Nightmare*, by **Richard Kim & Betsy Reed**, published by OR Books

**O**n the evening of November 4, 2008, progressives were in an ebullient mood. After eight long years of Republican rule, Barack Obama had been elected president. Accompanying our shouts of joy were audible sighs of relief. The prospect of a John McCain presidency had filled us with dread. But to imagine Sarah Palin – a conservative Christian with a penchant for folksy warmongering who flaunted her ignorance as a virtue – separated from the red button in the Oval Office only by a 72-year-old cancer survivor... that was beyond terrifying. Palin, we hoped, would slink back to Alaska, where her corrosive influence could be contained and perhaps ultimately extinguished, as her candidacy, historic in its way, became a footnote in an election filled with other, more galvanizing political developments.

As we write, it has been one year since that memorable night, and if the hard realities of governing a nation engulfed in two wars and a deep recession have somewhat dampened the hopes Obama raised during his campaign, another gnawing realization has crept in: The story of Sarah Palin is far from over. Her abrupt announcement over the July 4 weekend that she was quitting the governorship of Alaska may have removed her from public office, but it did little to diminish her presence in the public



**GOING ROUGE: Sarah Palin,  
An American Nightmare**

*Edited by Richard Kim  
& Betsy Reed*

**OR Books, \$16**  
(Available from  
<http://www.orbooks.com>)

Her abrupt announcement over the July 4 weekend that she was quitting the governorship of Alaska may have removed her from public office, but it did little to diminish her presence in the public eye.

eye. Her memoir, *Going Rogue*, with a first printing of 1.5 million copies, became a best seller thanks to preorders before it even hit the stores. While her approval rating among all voters hovers around 40 percent, among Republicans it still stands at the 70 percent mark. Disgruntled former McCain staffers

**Her name instantly conjures up a pungent brew of images, phrases and associations: just an average hockey mom of five, a pit bull with lipstick, beauty queen, moose hunter, long-distance runner, sexy librarian, winker, rogue – you betch!**

continue to snipe at her in the press, but she consistently ranks in the top tier of Republican presidential hopefuls. McCain's campaign manager Steve Schmidt – who sanctioned her selection as McCain's running mate – has said that a Palin presidential bid would be “catastrophic,” but McCain himself recently acknowledged that Palin is a “formidable force in the Republican Party” and a strong contender for the party's nomination in 2012. Compared to the all-male also-rans and might-have-beens that pop up in Republican straw polls – Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, Tim Pawlenty, Bobby Jindal, Ron Paul, and Rudy Giuliani – Palin is a bona fide celebrity. She transcends politics. As *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich puts it, Palin is “not just the party's biggest star and most charismatic television performer; she is its only star and charismatic performer.”

What explains this enduring allure? Her gender? Good looks? Her small-town Alaskan roots? Her fascinating biography and family drama? Undeniably, these are all part of the Sarah Palin mystique. Her name instantly conjures up a pungent brew of images, phrases and associations: just an average hockey mom of five, a pit bull with lipstick, beauty queen, moose hunter, long-distance runner, sexy librarian, winker, rogue – you betcha! But for those who care to look, beneath these shimmering surfaces there lies both a crude ideology and an alarmingly potent strategy for selling it. Like Nixon, Reagan, and George W. Bush, Palin has managed to become a brand unto herself, quite a feat for a failed vice presidential candidate. No one speaks of McCainism or Doleism, but Palinism signals not just a political position but a political style, a whole way of doing politics.

Palinism works by draping hard-right policy in a winning personal story and just-folks rhetoric, delicately masking the extremism of her true positions and broadening the audience for them. Its genius rests in its ability to magically absorb inconvenient facts and mutually contradic-

tory realities into an unassailable personal narrative. In the Palin universe, her unwed pregnant teenage daughter Bristol is somehow a poster child for abstinence-only education; hence criticism of Palin's sex-ed policies is an attack on her family.

While Palin says tolerantly that members of her own family disagree about abortion, that there are “good people” on both sides, and that she would “personally” counsel a pregnant 15-year-old who'd been raped by her father to “choose life,” she actually believes that a child in that situation should not have the legal option to terminate her pregnancy. Although Palin is an aggressive advocate for opening up the United States' oil reserves to drilling instead of investing in renewable energy, she labels herself “pro-environment,” a stance exemplified by her love of shooting animals or her husband's hobby of racing snowmobiles across the tundra. And who'd dare question Palin's foreign policy credentials, when her son Track shipped out to Iraq after high school?

To grasp the persistent power of Palinism, consider the “death panel” hysteria that hijacked the debate over health care reform in the summer of 2009. It began on July 24, when Betsy McCaughey, the former lieutenant governor of New York and Clinton health care antagonist, took to the pages of the *New York Post* to vilify Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, the brother of White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel and a health policy adviser to the Obama administration. Dr. Emanuel, McCaughey wrote, had advocated rationing health care away from the elderly and disabled, and the Democrats' health care reforms would “put the decisions about your care in the hands of presidential appointees” like him.

McCaughey's claims were easily debunked, and they initially failed to break into the mainstream. That changed on August 7, when Sarah Palin posted a screed against health care reform on her Facebook page that included this classic Palinism: “The America I know and love is not one in which

my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama's 'death panel' so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their 'level of productivity in society,' whether they are worthy of health care. Such a system is downright evil." With remarkable economy of prose, Palin cast health care reform as an assault on the country, put a face on its supposed victims (her baby Trig), coined the expression "death panel" (linking it directly to Obama), raised the specter of euthanasia in the service of a state-run economy, and rallied the troops around a fight against "evil."

In short, she personalized, popularized, and polarized the debate. Never mind that Democratic health care reform bills merely funded optional end-of-life consultations that had heretofore been almost universally acknowledged as a good. (Indeed, Palin herself once championed them in Alaska.) The madness exploded. Astroturf groups funded by the health insurance industry began pumping up the base of tea party protesters, who laid siege to town hall meetings, heckling elected officials from both parties. Fights broke out. Armed zealots began showing up at the president's speeches. Newt Gingrich appeared on *This Week* with George Stephanopolous and said, "There clearly are people in America who believe in establishing euthanasia, including selective standards."

Other Republican leaders took up the cause, and it was not until Obama flatly rejected death panels as "a lie, plain and simple" in his health care speech on September 9 that the public anxiety over them began to subside.

As this book goes to press, health care reform has yet to pass Congress, and it is unclear what effect the death panel uproar will have on the ultimate legislative outcome. But Palin's "death panel" crusade has already provided a chilling lesson: that a minority armed with conspiracy theories is capable of occupying the national political discourse as long as they have conviction and a mouthpiece.

This brand of politics – hostile to reform in Washington, despite its own reformist posture; unconstrained by any sense of obligation to be truthful and decent when confronting one's ideological foes – was not invented by Palin, but she has demonstrated a special knack for it ever since she landed on the national scene. During the election, it was Palin who trafficked in guilt by association, dredging up Obama's reed-thin connection to former Weatherman Bill Ayers and pushing McCain to make the Reverend Jeremiah Wright an issue, despite his pledge to leave Wright out of it. It was Palin who, addressing the surging, angry crowds at her campaign rallies, accused Obama of "palling around with terrorists," gratifying those who suspected him of being a secret Muslim born outside the country.

It was Palin who, while campaigning in North Carolina, praised small towns as "the real America" and the "pro-America areas of this great nation," fanning racialized fears of urban America and stoking the notion that Obama and his supporters intended a hostile takeover of the U.S. government. And more recently, it was Palin who was among the first to suggest that Obama, in his attempt to alleviate some of the pain caused by the recession, has launched the country on the path to "socialism." Of course, Sarah Palin does not espouse the entirety of the paranoid right's propaganda. She does not ask to see Barack Obama's birth certificate, and she does not show up at town halls toting a rifle and a knife. But she doesn't have to; suggestion and innuendo are her game, and in the swirl of resentments and phobias that fuel the American right, she is never far from the center.

That Sarah Palin occupies such a vital place in the Republican Party's zeitgeist – rivaled perhaps only by fellow "outsiders" Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh – is even more surprising when one considers the obscurity from which she was plucked by McCain on August 29, 2008. Palin had been mayor of a city of approximately

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7,000 and was just twenty months into her first term as governor of Alaska, the forty-seventh-most-populous state in the nation. This was hardly the resume with which to attack Obama for his lack of experience, the McCain campaign's then going strategy. But a unique set of circumstances convinced McCain's advisers that choosing Palin was the "game-changing" move they desperately needed to make.

The Palin pick was an arrow aimed not only at Obama but at the heart of the fragile Democratic coalition. With the soul-wrenching primary still a raw memory for Democrats torn between a charismatic, visionary black man and a feisty, competent female candidate, McCain's choice seemed at first to reflect an almost demonic genius. From where progressives stood at that time, Palin appeared to be the latest GOP rabbit-out-of-a-hat, conjured up in some steel-plated war room the likes of which we could scarcely imagine. All those passionate, fresh-faced Obama volunteers with their Facebook pages and house parties that we'd been celebrating as the new transformative force in American politics suddenly seemed pathetic, even tragic, next to the glowing apparition of Sarah Palin on our TV screens.

The spectacle of a woman being elevated to such a lofty place in the Republican Party hierarchy was certainly something to behold. Before her there had been Condoleezza Rice, secretary of state under Bush, and Liddy Dole's truncated run for the Republican nomination in 2000, among others, but GOP women had been cast either as bit players or members of the team, and now a woman was potentially entrusted with the presidency itself. What's more, Palin was clearly selected in part because of her womanly appeal. Her nomination was, to be sure, a milestone – finally, a working mother was being celebrated rather than guilt-tripped by family-values traditionalists. But it was also profoundly cynical.

Well before McCain's advisers settled on the choice, Palin's fortunes were avidly be-

ing promoted by besotted male conservatives like the *Weekly Standard's* Bill Kristol and Fred Barnes, Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson, and consultant Dick Morris, as Jane Mayer reports in her contribution in this book.

The party that congratulated itself for anointing a woman simultaneously embraced a platform advocating draconian restrictions on women's reproductive freedom (supporting a ban on abortion even in cases of rape, incest, and when the life of the mother is at stake), and its leaders stood against the Lilly Ledbetter act for pay equity, along with every other agenda item for the women's movement.

As pieces by Katha Pollitt and Gloria Steinem show, feminists were quick to expose the fraudulent nature of the GOP's gambit. As Steinem put it, "This isn't the first time a boss has picked an unqualified woman just because she agrees with him and opposes everything most other women want and need." The small matter of Palin's utter lack of qualifications for the job would become painfully more apparent as the campaign unfolded. For feminists – who had long heard complaints that affirmative action promotes mediocrity from the same quarters that now extolled Palin's virtues – the hypocrisy of the pick was too much to bear.

But there she was, the shining star of the Republican National Convention, and indisputably feminine. It was not only Palin herself but the sight of her brood of five children – including baby Trig, and Bristol, 17 and pregnant – along with the ruggedly handsome "first dude" Todd, that riveted the nation. As JoAnn Wypijewski points out in her contribution, Palin and her family are exemplars of the new Christian sexual politics. Married, fertile, God-fearing, and hot: Palin's sex appeal was a major factor in her bolt to stardom.

Finally, conservatives had found a fashionable and sexy icon – why let Hollywood liberals have all the fun? – and if Palin's looks led some to instantly dismiss her as a

pretty airhead, then many others hung on her every wink and word.

This double-edged effect of her gender and her beauty was on our minds when we selected the title *Going Rouge* for this book. (Appearances aside, it had nothing to do with the fact that Sarah Palin's forthcoming memoir is called *Going Rogue*; any similarities are purely coincidental.) While we could never be participants in the "Sarah Palin Pity Party" (in Rebecca Traister's memorable phrase), we are not without sympathy for the bind she has found herself in. In all fairness to Palin, the media attention devoted to her \$150,000 shopping spree to glam up her wardrobe – inappropriate though it may have been to use Republican National Committee cash for such a purpose, when the campaign was busy selling her as an Everywoman – was disproportionate.

It was not only a frivolous focus at a moment when the financial system was imploding and the U.S. military was waging wars on multiple fronts, but it revealed that Palin was subject to a sort of scrutiny that male candidates are generally spared (yes, John Edwards took flak for his \$400 haircuts, but even that had sexist overtones – he was labeled the "Breck Girl" for his excesses).

On the other hand, Palin and, by extension, the overwhelmingly white and male Republican Party leadership, having made the decision to "go rouge" – that is, to use her gender and sex appeal to advance their campaign to capture the White House – can't have expected this remarkable image transformation to pass without criticism, especially when what they stood for was antithetical to most women's needs and desires.

Looking back, progressives and feminists did an admirable job in picking apart the GOP's first female vice presidential nominee. When they attacked, they did so largely for the right reasons. In this book, we have assembled highlights from the reporting and commentary on her rise.

Chapter One focuses on her selection by John McCain – both the symbolic and the political reasons for the pick. Chapter Two examines her record in Alaska, as small-town mayor and then governor, with special attention to her links to the far right and her anti-environmental policies.

Chapter Three, "Palintology," features an assortment of vintage Selected Palinisms and a cross section of her lies and misrepresentations. In Chapters Four and Five – "Lipstick on a Faux Feminist: Palin and Women" and "The Palin Pageant: Sex, God, and Country First" – the cultural implications of her ascension are explored. Chapter Six takes stock of the ideology of Palinism; Chapter Seven chronicles her missteps and ultimate electoral defeat; and Chapter Eight illuminates her legacy and future in the Republican Party.

As it turned out, at the ballot box, most Americans proved they were able to see through the glossy packaging and peg Palin for what she was: a Christian fundamentalist opposed to the teaching of honest sex education in schools and in favor of teaching creationism alongside evolution, a climate-change-denier and government-basher alarmingly ignorant of the world and totally unprepared to be president. Women voted overwhelmingly for Obama – 56 percent to 43 percent for McCain/Palin – while men were about evenly split. Exit surveys showed that Palin was a drag on the Republican ticket.

But as we've seen, this is a woman with at least nine lives. By our count, having crashed and burned in Election 2008 and resigned ignominiously as governor, she's still got seven left. **CT**

**The Authors:** *Richard Kim is a senior editor at The Nation. Betsy Reed is executive editor of The Nation. She was the editor of "Unnatural Disaster: The Nation on Hurricane Katrina," and the anthology, "Nothing Sacred: Women Respond to religious Fundamentalism and Terror"*

**n all fairness to Palin, the media attention devoted to her \$150,000 shopping spree to glam up her wardrobe – inappropriate though it may have been to use Republican National Committee cash for such a purpose, when the campaign was busy selling her as an Everywoman – was disproportionate**

# Why I'll never buy a Kindle

**Benjamin Dangel** is still in love with print and paper and his local public library. Here's why

**One reader wrote me to say that a copy of my first book, *The Price of Fire*, was on the back of the toilet seat when her toddler woke up early one morning raising havoc and ended up knocking the book into the toilet**

A green crochet cover envelopes the Kindle of Eileen Messina in Freeport, Maine. She has downloaded a number of popular titles onto her reading device – one of many new handheld digital gadgets now available to read books. *New Yorker* reporter Nicholson Baker wrote that Messina lamented that books at the library sometimes smelled of cigarette smoke. Baker says, “a Kindle book is a smoke-free environment.”

But a lot of book-readers, myself included, enjoy the smell and palpable history of a book from a library or used bookstore. There is something comforting about the shared experience of reading a physical book many others have read, and will read in the future. I like the story of a used book – a folded page, the markings on the margins, the hints at its past. Sure, sometimes they smell like cigarette smoke, but they can also smell like the places they've been, whether it's a dusty old used bookstore or the tropical funk of Asunción, Paraguay. You can't share a Kindle book and so history doesn't cling to it the same way.

One bookstore in London has a display of items left accidentally in used books that were donated to the store. In the *Guardian*, Theresa Malone writes that the display includes “a chest x-ray, an air freight invoice and the handwritten guest list to a party, complete with notes for the host's speech.

...about a dozen photo albums containing family holiday snaps, wedding day memories, pictures of pets and more are laid out on a table for customers to browse through.”

These leftovers from another period in the book's history aren't something you can ever get with the Kindle. As Malone writes, “The creased spines and turned down pages, those makeshift bookmarks from a bygone age, all signs that the book, which is now yours, has been in the past a real, tangible, treasured possession.”

There is also the story of the actual geographic journey of a book, the travels of something born out of a keyboard that later takes on a life of its own. One reader wrote me to say that a copy of my first book, *The Price of Fire*, was on the back of the toilet seat when her toddler woke up early one morning raising havoc and ended up knocking the book into the toilet. Once, just after finishing a copy of Ramon Ryan's book *Clandestines in Argentina*, my backpack – with the book in it – was stolen in Buenos Aires. Who knows where that book might be right now?

Such stories of books have parallels to the widely circulated news of 30,000 plastic toy ducks that were washed into the Pacific Ocean in 1992 when the container carrying them fell off the cargo ship. The Times Online reported that “Two thirds of them floated south through the tropics, landing

months later on the shores of Indonesia, Australia and South America. But 10,000 headed north and by the end of the year were off Alaska and heading back westwards. It took three years for the ducks to circle east to Japan, past the original drop site and then back to Alaska on a current known as the North Pacific Gyre before continuing north towards the Arctic.”

Like one of these plastic ducks, one never knows where a book might end up. There isn't the same mystery with the Kindle. As Rebecca Solnit writes in her book, *Hope in the Dark*, “Writing is a model for how indirect effect can be, how delayed, how invisible; no one is more hopeful than a writer, no one is a bigger gambler... You write books. You scatter seeds. Rats might eat them or they may rot...”

With a Kindle on the other hand, you know where it will end up – with the rest of the toxic trash heaps that our newest technical gadgets are eventually destined for. Baker of the *New Yorker* writes that the Kindle is “made of exotic materials that are shipped all over the world's oceans; yes, it requires electricity to operate and air-conditioned server farms to feed it; yes, it's fragile and it duplicates what other machines do; yes, it's difficult to recycle; yes, it will probably take a last boat ride to a Nigerian landfill in five years.”

However, the Kindle does save trees, and in a country that trashes 83 million tons of paper annually, that's no small task.

But whatever happened to just going to the library? As Kiera writes at *Mother Jones*, “The San Francisco library bought 78,445 books in 2008. Let's assume each of the library's 2,265,209 visitors borrowed two books.” By doing that “You've reduced your

reading emissions to 42 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub>, nearly an eighth of what they would be if you bought all your books new.”

Maybe your local public library has shut down, like so many other cash-strapped libraries across the country. Columnist Katha Pollitt points out, “If the government can bail out the banks that are so deeply implicated in our current troubles ... Why can't it support libraries and schools and publishing by stocking the public bookshelves with inviting new books and hiring staff to keep the doors open?”

Instead of shelling out hundreds of dollars for a Kindle, why not just go to the library for the book you're looking for. And when you're there, hand a check for the money you would have spent on the Kindle to the librarian.

With Kindles we lose more than the smell of cigarette smoke on the pages of a library book. As one character in Ray Bradbury's book *Fahrenheit 451* said, “Do you know why books such as this are so important? Because they have quality. And what does the word quality mean? To me it means texture. This book has pores. It has features. This book can go under the microscope. You'd find life under the glass, streaming past in infinite profusion.”

CT

**Benjamin Dangl** is the author of *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia* (AK Press, 2007). He is also the editor of *TowardFreedom.com*, a progressive perspective on world events, and *UpsideDownWorld.org*, a news website uncovering activism and politics in Latin America.

This essay originally appeared at [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org)

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# Normalising the crime of the century

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair will be exonerated by the Chilcot enquiry into the Iraq war, in yet another state whitewash of its own crimes, writes **John Pilger**

**An attack on a sovereign state is a crime. This was made clear by Britain's chief law officer, Attorney General Peter Goldsmith, before his arm was twisted, and by the Foreign Office's own legal advisers and subsequently by the secretary-general of the United Nations**

**I**tried to contact Mark Higson the other day only to learn he had died nine years ago. He was just 40, an honourable man. We met soon after he had resigned from the Foreign Office in 1991 and I asked him if the government knew that Hawk fighter-bombers sold to Indonesia were being used against civilians in East Timor.

"Everyone knows," he said, "except parliament and the public."

"And the media?"

"The media – the big names – have been invited to King Charles Street (the Foreign Office) and flattered and briefed with lies. They are no trouble."

As Iraq desk officer at the Foreign Office, he had drafted letters for ministers reassuring MPs and the public that the British Government was not arming Saddam Hussein. "This was a downright lie", he said. "I couldn't bear it".

Giving evidence before the arms-to-Iraq enquiry, Higson was the only British official commended by Lord Justice Scott for telling the truth. The price he paid was the loss of his health and marriage and constant surveillance by spooks. He ended up living on benefits in a Birmingham bedsitter where he suffered a seizure, struck his head and died alone. Whistleblowers are often heroes; he was one.

He came to mind when I saw a picture

in the paper of another Foreign Office official, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, who was Tony Blair's ambassador to the United Nations in the build-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. More than anyone, it was Sir Jeremy who tried every trick to find a UN cover for the bloodbath to come. Indeed, this was his boast to the Chilcot enquiry on 27 November, where he described the invasion as "legal but of questionable legitimacy". How clever. In the picture he wore a smirk.

Under international law, "questionable legitimacy" does not exist. An attack on a sovereign state is a crime. This was made clear by Britain's chief law officer, Attorney General Peter Goldsmith, before his arm was twisted, and by the Foreign Office's own legal advisers and subsequently by the secretary-general of the United Nations. The invasion is the crime of the 21st century. During 17 years of assault on a defenceless civilian population, veiled with weasel monikers like "sanctions" and "no fly zones" and "building democracy", more people have died in Iraq than during the peak years of the slave trade. Set that against Sir Jeremy's skin-saving revisionism about American "noises" that were "decidedly unhelpful to what I was trying to do [at the UN] in New York". Moreover, "I myself warned the Foreign Office ... that I might have to consider my own position ...".

It wasn't me, guv.

The purpose of the Chilcot inquiry is to normalise an epic crime by providing enough of a theatre of guilt to satisfy the media so that the only issue that matters, that of prosecution, is never raised. When he appears in January, Blair will play this part to odious perfection, dutifully absorbing the hisses and boos. All “inquiries” into state crimes are neutered in this way. In 1996, Lord Justice Scott’s arms-to-Iraq report obfuscated the crimes his investigations and voluminous evidence had revealed.

At that time, I interviewed Tim Laxton, who had attended every day of the inquiry as auditor of companies taken over by MI6 and other secret agencies as vehicles for the illegal arms trade with Saddam Hussein. Had there been a full and open criminal investigation, Laxton told me, “hundreds” would have faced prosecution. “They would include,” he said, “top political figures, very senior civil servants from right throughout Whitehall ... the top echelon of government.”

That is why Chilcot is advised by the likes of Sir Martin Gilbert, who compared Blair with Churchill and Roosevelt. That is why the inquiry will not demand the release of documents that would illuminate the role of the entire Blair gang, notably Blair’s 2003 cabinet, long silent. Who remembers the threat of the thuggish Geoff Hoon, Blair’s “defence secretary”, to use nuclear weapons against Iraq?

In February, Jack Straw, one of Blair’s principal accomplices, the man who let the mass murderer General Pinochet escape justice and the current “justice secretary”, overruled the Information Commissioner who had ordered the government to pub-

lish Cabinet minutes during the period Lord Goldsmith was pressured into changing his judgement that the invasion was illegal. How they fear exposure, and worse.

The media has granted itself immunity. On 27 November, Scott Ritter, the former UN chief weapons inspector, wrote that the invasion “was made far easier given the role of useful idiot played by much of the mainstream media in the US and Britain.” More than four years before the invasion, Ritter, in interviews with myself and others, left not a shred of doubt that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction had been disabled, yet he was made a non-person. In 2002, when the Bush/Blair lies were in full echo across the media, the Guardian and Observer mentioned Iraq in more than 3,000 articles, of which 49 referred to Ritter and his truth that could have saved thousands of lives.

What has changed? On 30 November, the *Independent* published a pristine piece of propaganda from its embedded man in Afghanistan. “Troops fear defeat at home,” said the headline. Britain, said the report, “is at serious risk of losing its way in Afghanistan because rising defeatism at home is demoralising the troops on the front line, military commanders have warned.” In fact, public disgust with the disaster in Afghanistan is mirrored among many serving troops and their families; and this frightens the warmongers. So “defeatism” and “demoralising the troops” are added to the weasel lexicon. Good try. Unfortunately, like Iraq, Afghanistan is a crime. Period. **CT**

*John Pilger received the Sydney Peace Prize last month. His latest book, “Freedom Next Time,” is now available in paperback*

**Scott Ritter, the former UN chief weapons inspector, wrote that the invasion “was made far easier given the role of useful idiot played by much of the mainstream media in the US and Britain”**

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# Will we ever stop the killings?

An episode with a pistol-wielding robber sets **Sherwood Ross** thinking that it's about time the US took a fresh look at the way it tackles the war in its streets

**He caught the wallet, turned and fled across a wide, deserted ballpark**

Every time the young stick-up man tugged at my companion's purse with his left hand, she would pull back, causing the muzzle of the pistol he held in his right hand to swing back and forth. Its line of fire each time was directed across my chest and if he accidentally or deliberately squeezed the trigger this piece might never have been written.

"Give him your purse!" I insisted, meaning that hanging on to it wasn't worth our lives. Still, she refused and the tug-of-war in the parking lot of my apartment building continued.

"Here!" I said to the gunman, pitching my wallet to him, "take this!" He caught the wallet, turned and fled across a wide, deserted ballpark. Even in the darkness, we could follow him running for a long way, silhouetted in the lights of the U.S. Capitol, lit up at night ahead of him like a giant white cake.

A few days later I received a call from a Maryland department store inquiring if I had sent a young man to buy a TV set on my credit card. A store detective arrested the youth and I dutifully showed up in court on the day of the trial only to learn he had skipped.

Not long afterwards, a judge who lived in my building made page one of the Washington Star for resisting the gunmen who jumped him in the same parking lot. From

his hospital bed he told reporters we Americans had to "stand up" to armed robbers, a noble sentiment spoken through his pain, considering all the bullets they pumped into his body.

We were lucky, my friend and I. We could have been killed, as so many others are being killed each day. As Jill Lepore writes in the Nov 9th issue of the *New Yorker*, the U.S. "has the highest homicide rate of any affluent democracy, nearly four times that of France and the United Kingdom and six times that of Germany." UK averages about 60 gun homicides annually and Germany averages fewer than 200. More Americans are being murdered on our city streets than in all our foreign wars.

*New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert last April 24th estimated 12,000 Americans are shot dead each year, 2,000 of them children, and 70,000 more are wounded but, like the D.C. judge, survive. Do the math: the total number of Americans shot dead each year is three times that of all U.S. troops killed in Iraq in six years of fighting. There is rage in our hearts; there is war in our streets.

A big factor in the homicide rate is the availability of guns. In a typical year, guns are responsible for two of every three murders. There are 238 million privately-owned firearms in USA. Big city mayors and police chiefs favoring curbs on hand guns and au-

tomatic weapons seem unable to overcome the clout of the gun lobby in Congress. Americans have modified or ignored much of the U.S. Constitution over the years yet the National Rifle Association insists that the 2nd Amendment phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed” is sacrosanct, even as innocent people are mowed down by the thousands.

Wayne LaPierre, NRA executive vice president, writes, “One of the ugly truths about many gun-control advocates is that they’re more concerned about pushing for gun control than they are about reducing violence.”

Note how LaPierre disparages their motives, when, in fact, some people become gun-control advocates only after the murder or wounding of a family member or friend. It’s quite likely that if homicidal waves of handgun violence did not occur nearly every day, as they do, nobody would bother chalking the slogan “Gun Control Now!” on the NRA wall.

“A vastly disproportionate number of murders and murder victims are young adult men,” writes *The New Yorker’s* Lepore. “When baby boomers reached that age bracket, the homicide rate soared. Now that they’ve aged out of their most lethal years, the rate has fallen.”

Fallen, yet still unacceptable. Marcus Baram of ABC News reported last April 23 that teenagers in Chicago are 10 times more likely to be the victims of gun violence than their counterparts outside the city limits. Between 2002 and 2006, more than 650 Chicago teens were shot and killed! This is nearly as many as all U.S. troop deaths since the start of the war in Afghanistan. Are defenders of “gun rights” blind to the fact we have a war raging in our city streets?

Surely, one factor contributing to the homicide rate is poverty. How many times have you read about youths from affluent suburbs arrested for armed robbery? Can you think of one? Not only are children in

blighted cityscapes – where supermarkets and chain retail outlets fear to tread – deprived of legitimate job opportunities but if they commit crime, do time and are set free, their criminal past makes it tough for them to find gainful work. It’s not uncommon for six or seven out of every ten ex-cons to be returned to the Big House within three years of their release, the Justice Department reports. Worse, as “economy measures,” legislators right now are closing down prison drug rehab, educational, and vocational programs that would give ex-cons a fighting chance to succeed. There’s money for wars in three countries in the Middle East and money to operate a thousand military bases around the world but we short-change our own.

#### Stiff sentences

Another contributing factor to the high homicide rate may be the stiff sentences politicians’ mandate, enacting laws that limit the sentencing discretion of judges. In his treatise “On Crimes and Punishments,” published in 1764, Italian nobleman Cesare Beccaria wrote, “The countries and times most notorious for severity of punishment have always been those in which the bloodiest and most inhumane of deeds were committed.”

Famed Chicago lawyer Clarence Darrow argued harsh laws did zero to deter crime. In 18th Century England, he noted, pickpockets worked the crowds at public hangings even though picking pockets was punishable by hanging. Today, stiff sentences have contributed to putting a record 2.3 million Americans behind bars, so many that judges from Alabama to California are ordering governors to make their prisons livable. Legislators are considering paroling oldsters rather than building more lock-ups.

In Congress, bills are being debated (1) to require criminal background checks for all would-be buyers at gun shows, reversing the no-questions-asked practice; (2) to limit bulk sales of handguns; and (3) to

**It’s not uncommon for six or seven out of every ten ex-cons to be returned to the Big House within three years of their release, the Justice Department reports**

## GUN CONTROL

**Another anti-violence step would be to pay children to stay in school. This could put money into the pockets of young males who might otherwise pull stick-ups**

ferret out that small minority of reckless licensed gun dealers whose sales account for 60% of crime scene weapons. Such laws can work. Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D.-N.J.) claims since enactment of his bill preventing domestic abusers from buying a gun, more than 150,000 attempted gun purchases have been blocked.

In California, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recently signed a law obligating sellers of handgun ammunition to record the names of buyers and other information about their purchase. A similar law in Sacramento from mid-January, 2008, through August, 2009, helped police find 229 prohibited people who had illegally bought ammunition – 173 of them with previous felony convictions. And by matching ammo purchases with names on the state's prohibited persons file, the Sacramento D.A. could charge 181 illegal ammunition buyers with felonies, according to an article on the Huffington Post.

Californians are reacting to a series of horrific shooting murders. For one, there was the Los Angeles city worker on Feb. 25, 2005, who sprayed his boss and another employee with AK-47 bullets after being reprimanded for showing up late for work. For another, there was the murder at a traffic stop of four Oakland police officers last March 21 by a shooter with a long criminal record. Other states need to follow California's initiative.

Another anti-violence step would be to pay children to stay in school. This could put money into the pockets of young males who might otherwise pull stick-ups, such as the one in Washington referred to above. One organization, the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, (NIF-ty for short)

advises public school children on how to earn money buying and selling, and many trained kids open their own retail outlets. NFTE founder Steve Mariotti, a former Ford auto executive, got the idea after he was mugged jogging in Manhattan by some youths for the few bucks he was carrying. His outfit reports it has helped 230,000 young people run businesses in 22 states and 13 countries.

Beyond these steps, educators need to press for courses to teach non-violence in our public schools. After all, American children are deluged with violence-filled Hollywood movies and video games where killing is trivialized. The Non-Violence Project USA Inc., whose symbol is a handgun with a knotted barrel, is one non-profit that engages teens in pro-social activities, recognizing the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi's observation, "If we are to achieve real peace, we shall have to begin with children."

Executive Director Diane Landsberg of the Miami chapter in Coral Gables, Fla., says, "We have become a very rude and impatient society. We are taught to rush but not to wait. Courtesy and politeness matters. In order to get respect you've got to give respect."

One positive action might be for the NRA's LaPierre to show his critics some respect, to give their ideas a chance, as in Sacramento, to make a difference. **CT**

***Sherwood Ross** is a public relations consultant for good causes. He formerly worked as a reporter for the Chicago Daily News and as a columnist for major wire services. Reach him at [sherwoodross10@gmail.com](mailto:sherwoodross10@gmail.com)*

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# Afghanistan's sham army

If the US expects that training an Afghan army will win its war against the Taliban, they're wrong, writes **Chis Hedges**

Success in Afghanistan is measured in Washington by the ability to create an indigenous army that will battle the Taliban, provide security and stability for Afghan civilians and remain loyal to the puppet government of Hamid Karzai. A similar task eluded the Red Army, although the Soviets spent a decade attempting to pacify the country. It eluded the British a century earlier. And the United States, too, will fail.

American military advisers who work with the Afghan National Army, or ANA, speak of poorly trained and unmotivated Afghan soldiers who have little stomach for military discipline and even less for fighting. They describe many ANA units as being filled with brigands who terrorize local populations, exacting payments and engaging in intimidation, rape and theft. They contend that the ANA is riddled with Taliban sympathizers. And when there are combined American and Afghan operations against the Taliban insurgents, ANA soldiers are fickle and unreliable combatants, the U.S. advisers say.

American military commanders in Afghanistan, rather than pump out statistics about enemy body counts, measure progress by the swelling size of the ANA. The bigger the ANA, the better we are supposedly doing. The pressure on trainers to increase the numbers of the ANA means that

training and vetting of incoming Afghan recruits is nearly nonexistent.

The process of induction for Afghan soldiers begins at the Kabul Military Training Center. American instructors at the Kabul center routinely complain of shortages of school supplies such as whiteboards, markers and paper. They often have to go to markets and pay for these supplies on their own or do without them. Instructors are pressured to pass all recruits and graduate many who have been absent for a third to half the training time. Most are inducted into the ANA without having mastered rudimentary military skills.

"I served the first half of my tour at the Kabul Military Training Center, where I was part of a small team working closely with the ANA to set up the country's first officer basic course for newly commissioned Afghan lieutenants," a U.S. Army first lieutenant who was deployed last year and who asked not to be identified by name told me. "During the second half of my tour, I left Kabul's military schoolhouse and was reassigned to an embedded tactical training team, or ETT team, to help stand up a new Afghan logistics battalion in Herat.

"Afghan soldiers leave the KMTC grossly unqualified," this lieutenant, who remains on active duty, said. "American mentors do what they can to try and fix these problems, but their efforts are blocked by pressure

**American military commanders in Afghanistan, rather than pump out statistics about enemy body counts, measure progress by the swelling size of the ANA**

## ANOTHER WAR

**The ANA is unable to integrate ground units with artillery and air support. It has no functioning supply system. It depends on the American military to do basic tasks. The United States even pays the bulk of ANA salaries**

from higher, both in Afghan and American chains of command, to pump out as many soldiers as fast as possible.”

Afghan soldiers are sent from the Kabul Military Training Center directly to active-duty ANA units. The units always have American trainers, known as a “mentoring team,” attached to them. The rapid increase in ANA soldiers has outstripped the ability of the American military to provide trained mentoring teams. The teams, normally comprised of members of the Army Special Forces, are now formed by plucking American soldiers, more or less at random, from units all over Afghanistan.

“This is how my entire team was selected during the middle of my tour: a random group of people from all over Kabul – Air Force, Navy, Army, active-duty and National Guard – pulled from their previous assignments, thrown together and expected to do a job that none of us were trained in any meaningful way to do,” the officer said. “We are expected, by virtue of time-in-grade and membership in the U.S. military, to be able to train a foreign force in military operations, an extremely irresponsible policy that is ethnocentric at its core and which assumes some sort of natural superiority in which an untrained American soldier has everything to teach the Afghans, but nothing to learn.

“You’re lucky enough if you had any mentorship training at all, something the Army provides in a limited capacity at pre-mobilization training at Fort Riley, but having none is the norm,” he said. “Soldiers who receive their pre-mobilization training at Fort Bragg learn absolutely nothing about mentoring foreign forces aside from being given a booklet on the subject, and yet soldiers who go through Bragg before being shipped to Afghanistan are just as likely to be assigned to mentoring teams as anyone else.”

The differences between the Afghan military structure and the American military structure are substantial. The ANA handles logistics differently. Its rank structure is not

the same. Its administration uses different military terms. It rarely works with the aid of computers or basic technology. The cultural divide leaves most trainers, who do not speak Dari, struggling to figure out how things work in the ANA.

“The majority of my time spent as a mentor involved trying to understand what the Afghans were doing and how they were expected to do it, and only then could I even begin to advise anyone on the problems they were facing,” this officer said. “In other words, American military advisers aren’t immediately helpful to Afghans. There is a major learning curve involved that is sometimes never overcome. Some advisers play a pivotal role, but many have little or no effect as mentors.”

The real purpose of American advisers assigned to ANA units, however, is not ultimately to train Afghans but to function as a liaison between Afghan units and American firepower and logistics. The ANA is unable to integrate ground units with artillery and air support. It has no functioning supply system. It depends on the American military to do basic tasks. The United States even pays the bulk of ANA salaries.

“In the unit I was helping to mentor, orders for mission-essential equipment such as five-ton trucks went unfilled for months, and winter clothes came late due to national shortages,” the officer told me. “Many soldiers in the unit had to make do for the first few weeks of Afghanistan’s winter without jackets or other cold-weather items.”

But what disturbs advisers most is the widespread corruption within the ANA which has enraged and alienated local Afghans and proved to be a potent recruiting tool for the Taliban.

“In the Afghan logistics battalion I was embedded with, the commander himself was extorting a local shopkeeper, and his staff routinely stole from the local store,” the adviser said. “In Kabul, on one humanitarian aid mission I was on, we handed out school supplies to children, and in an attempt to lend validity to the ANA we

had them [ANA members] distribute the supplies. As it turns out, we received intelligence reports that that very same group of ANA had been extorting money from the villagers under threat of violence. In essence, we teamed up with well-known criminals and local thugs to distribute aid in the very village they had been terrorizing, and that was the face of American charity.”

We have pumped billions of dollars into Afghanistan and occupied the country for eight years. We currently spend some \$4 billion a month on Afghanistan. But we are unable to pay for whiteboards and markers for instructors at the Kabul Military Training Center. Afghan soldiers lack winter jackets. Kabul is still in ruins. Unemployment is estimated at about 40 percent. And Afghanistan is one of the most food-insecure countries on the planet.

What are we doing? Where is this money going?

Look to the civilian contractors. These contractors dominate the lucrative jobs in Afghanistan. The American military, along with the ANA, is considered a poor relation.

“When I arrived in theater, one of the things I was shocked to see was how many civilians were there,” the U.S. officer said. “Americans and foreign nationals from Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia were holding jobs in great numbers in Kabul. There are a ton of corporations in Afghanistan performing labor that was once exclusively in the realm of the military. If you’re a [military] cook, someone from Kellogg Brown & Root has taken your spot. If you’re a logistician or military adviser, someone from MPRI, Military Professional Resources Inc., will probably take over your job soon. If you’re a technician or a mechanic, there are civilians from Harris Corp. and other companies there who are taking over more and more of your responsibilities.”

“I deployed with a small unit of about 100 or so military advisers and mentors,” he went on. “When we arrived in Afghanistan,

nearly half our unit had to be reassigned because their jobs had been taken over by civilians from MPRI. It seems that even in a war zone, soldiers are at risk of losing their jobs to outsourcing. And if you’re a reservist, the situation is even more unfortunate. You are torn from your life to serve a year-long tour of duty away from your civilian job, your friends and family only to end up in Afghanistan with nothing to do because your military duty was passed on to a civilian contractor. Eventually you are thrown onto a mentoring team somewhere, or some [other] responsibility is created for you. It becomes evident that the corporate presence in Afghanistan has a direct effect on combat operations.”

The American military has been largely privatized, although Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, has still recommended a 40,000-troop increase. The Army’s basic functions have been outsourced to no-bid contractors. What was once done by the military with concern for tactical and strategic advancement is done by war profiteers concerned solely about profit. The aims of the military and the contractors are in conflict. A scaling down of the war or a withdrawal is viewed by these corporations as bad for business. But expansion of the war, as many veterans will attest, is only making the situation more precarious.

“American and Afghan soldiers are putting their lives at risk, Afghan civilians are dying, and yet there’s this underlying system in place that gains more from keeping all of them in harm’s way rather than taking them out of it,” the officer complained. “If we bring peace and stability to Afghanistan, we may profit morally, we might make gains for humanity, but moral profits and human gains do not contribute to the bottom line. Peace and profit are ultimately contradictory forces at work in Afghanistan.”

The wells that are dug, the schools that are built, the roads that are paved and the food distributed in Afghan villages by the

**What was once done by the military with concern for tactical and strategic advancement is done by war profiteers concerned solely about profit. The aims of the military and the contractors are in conflict**

## ANOTHER WAR

**The real threat to stability in Afghanistan is not the Taliban, but widespread hunger and food shortages, crippling poverty, rape, corruption and a staggering rate of unemployment that mounts as foreign companies take jobs away from the local workers and businesses**

occupation forces are used to obscure the huge profits made by contractors. Only an estimated 10 percent of the money poured into Afghanistan is used to ameliorate the suffering of Afghan civilians. The remainder is swallowed by contractors who siphon the money out of Afghanistan and into foreign bank accounts. This misguided allocation of funds is compounded in Afghanistan because the highest-paying jobs for Afghans go to those who can act as interpreters for the American military and foreign contractors. The best-educated Afghans are enticed away from Afghan institutions that desperately need their skills and education.

“It is this system that has broken the logistics of Afghanistan,” the officer said. “It is this system of waste and private profit from public funds that keeps Kabul in ruins. It is this system that manages to feed Westerners all across the country steak and lobster once a week while an estimated 8.4 million Afghans – the entire population of New York City, the five boroughs – suffer from chronic food insecurity and starvation every day. When you go to Bagram Air Base, or Camp Phoenix, or Camp Eggers, it’s clear to see that the problem does not lie in getting supplies into the country. The question becomes who gets them. And we wonder why there’s an insurgency.”

The problem in Afghanistan is not ultimately a military problem. It is a political and social problem. The real threat to stability in Afghanistan is not the Taliban, but widespread hunger and food shortages, crippling poverty, rape, corruption and a staggering rate of unemployment that mounts as foreign companies take jobs away from the local workers and busi-

nesses. The corruption and abuse by the Karzai government and the ANA, along with the presence of foreign contractors, are the central impediments to peace. The more we empower these forces, the worse the war will become. The plan to escalate the number of American soldiers and Marines, and to swell the ranks of the Afghan National Army, will not or defeat or pacify the Taliban.

“What good are a quarter-million well-trained Afghan troops to a nation slipping into famine?” the officer asked. “What purpose does a strong military serve with a corrupt and inept government in place? What hope do we have for peace if the best jobs for the Afghans involve working for the military? What is the point of getting rid of the Taliban if it means killing civilians with airstrikes and supporting a government of misogynist warlords and criminals?”

“We as Americans do not help the Afghans by sending in more troops, by increasing military spending, by adding chaos to disorder,” he said. “What little help we do provide is only useful in the short term and is clearly unsustainable in the face of our own economic crisis. In the end, no one benefits from this war, not America, not Afghans. Only the CEOs and executive officers of war-profiteering corporations find satisfactory returns on their investments.” **CT**

*Chris Hedges spent two decades as a foreign reporter covering wars in Latin America, Africa, Europe and the Middle East. He has written nine books, including “Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle” (2009) and “War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning” (2003)*

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# Globalisation unchecked

**Ramzy Baroud** tells how alien media is suffocating the real culture of the Middle East

A Muslim family sits across from me in a café in a largely Muslim Asia country. An older woman shyly hunches over, desperately trying to avoid eye contact with the giant plasma TV, blazing loud music on the popular music video channel, MTV. The scantily dressed presenter introduces her ‘top song’ for the week. Beyonce, dressed in so very little, annoyingly reiterates that she is “a single lady.” The old woman’s son is mesmerized by what he sees. He pays no attention to his mother, young wife or even his own son who wreaks havoc in the coffee shop. The man’s T-shirt reads: “What the fxxx are you looking at?”

Respecting the message on his T-shirt, I try to keep to myself, but find it increasingly difficult. The wife is completely covered, all but her face. The contradictions are ample, overwhelming even.

The dress of the family, the attitude of the ladies and even the man with the provocative T-shirt are all signs of the cultural schizophrenia that permeates many societies in the so-called Third World. It’s a side effect of globalization that few wish to talk about.

It’s almost always about trade, foreign investment, capital flow and all the rest. But what about culture, identity, traditions and ways of life; do these things amount to anything?

True, globalization has various manifestations. If viewed strictly from economic terms, then the debate delves into trade barriers, protectionism and tariffs. Powerful countries demand smaller countries to break down all trade barriers, while maintaining a level of protectionism over their own. Smaller countries, knowing that they cannot do much to hide from the hegemonic nature of globalization, form their own economic clubs, hoping to negotiate fairer deals. And the economic tug-of-war continues, between diplomacy and threats, dialogue and arm twisting. This is the side of globalization with which most of us are familiar.

But there is another side of globalization, one that is similarly detrimental to some countries, and profitable to others: cultural globalization – not necessarily the domination of a specific culture, in this case Western culture, over all the rest – but rather the unbridgeable disadvantage of poorer countries, who lack the means to withstand the unmitigated takeover of their traditional ways of life by the dazzling, well-packaged and branded ‘culture’ imparted upon them around the clock.

What audiences watch, read and listen to in most countries outside the Western hemisphere is not truly Western culture in the strict definition of the term, of course. It’s a selective brand of a culture, a reduc-

**The dress of the family, the attitude of the ladies and even the man with the provocative T-shirt are all signs of the cultural schizophrenia that permeates many societies in the so-called Third World**

## COLLIDING CULTURES

**Before globalization, cultural influences were introduced at much slower speed. It allowed societies, big and small, to reflect, consider, and adjust to these unique notions over time**

tionist presentation of art, entertainment, news, and so on, as platforms to promote ideas that would ultimately sell products. For the dwarfed representation of Western culture, it's all about things, tangible material values that can be obtained by that simple and final act of pulling out one's credit card. To sell a product, however, media also sell ideas, often one sided, and create unjustifiable fascinations with ways of life that hardly represent natural progression for many vanishing cultures and communities around the world.

### **Shouting match**

Recently in some Gulf country, a few Turkish teenagers turned an Internet café into a shouting match as they engaged one another in a violent computer game. I desperately tried to mind my own business, but their shrieks of victory and defeat were deafening. "Kill the Terrorist", one of them yelled in English, with a thick Turkish accent. The "Rs" in "terrorists" rolled over his tongue so unnaturally. For a moment, he was an "American", killing "terrorists", who, bizarrely looked more Turkish than American. As I walked out, I glanced at the screen. Among the rubble, there was a mosque, or what was left of it. The young Turkish Muslim was congratulated by his friends for his handy work.

There is nothing wrong with exchanges of ideas, of course. Cultural interactions are historically responsible for much of the great advancements and evolution in art, science, language, even food and much more. But, before globalization, cultural influences were introduced at much slower speed. It allowed societies, big and small, to reflect, consider, and adjust to these unique notions over time. But the globalization of the media is unfair. It gives no chance for mulling anything over, for determining the benefits or the harms, for any sort of value analysis. News, music and even pornography are beamed directly to all sorts of screens and gadgets. When Beyonce sings she is a 'single lady', the whole world

must know, instantly. This may sound like a harmless act, but the cultural contradictions eventually morph into conflicts and clashes, in figurative and real senses.

More, it makes little sense, for example, that Asian audiences are consumers of Fox News and Sky News, while both are regarded as rightwing media platforms in their original markets. And what can Nepali television, for example, do to control media moguls and morphing media empires all around? Young people grow, defining themselves according to someone else's standards, thus the Turkish teenager, temporarily adopting the role of the "American", blows up his own mosque.

Globalization is not a fair game, of course. Those with giant economies get the lion's share of the 'collective' decision-making. Those with more money and global outlook tend to have influential media, also with global outlook. In both scenarios, small countries are lost between desperately trying to negotiate a better economic standing for themselves, while hopelessly trying to maintain their cultural identity, which defined their people, generation after generation throughout history.

The Muslim family eventually left the coffee shop. The husband watched MTV throughout his stay; the young wife, clicked endlessly on her iPhone, and the older woman glanced at the TV from time to time, then quickly looked the other way. One is certain that a few years ago, that family would have enjoyed an entirely different experience. Alas, a few years from today, they might not even sit at the same table. **CT**

**Ramzy Baroud** ([www.ramzybaroud.net](http://www.ramzybaroud.net)) is an author and editor of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His latest book is, "The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle" (Pluto Press, London), and his forthcoming book is, "My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story" (Pluto Press, London), now available for pre-orders on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

# Media, money and Sun-Myun Moon

Rory O'Connor tells how the leader of a Korean church started a newspaper and bought political power in Washington

In January 1992, PBS Frontline broadcast a film I directed that documented the amazing rise, fall and subsequent resurrection of Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church movement. The documentary showed how, through an adroit combination of money, media and the consistent promotion of a conservative political agenda, a self-styled Messiah and convicted felon had rapidly reinvented himself and was soon hailed at the White House.

At the time, few Americans paid much attention to Reverend Moon – and those that did had bizarre recollections of him and the “Moonies,” as his followers once called themselves: mass weddings of complete strangers, flower-peddling in the street, and repeated allegations of mind control and brainwashing.

Even back then, Moon’s movement, once labeled a cult, was more accurately described as a conglomerate. As my film stated, “From media operations in the nation’s capital ... To substantial real estate holdings throughout the United States ... And from large commercial fishing operations ... To advanced high-tech and computer industries, a Fifth Avenue publishing house, and literally dozens of other businesses, foundations, associations, institutes, and political and cultural groups ... Moon and his money have become a force

to be reckoned with.”

One of the primary vehicles for Moon’s rising power and influence was the daily newspaper the *Washington Times*, now back in the news because of the mysterious departure of its top executives, and facing an uncertain future.

But back then the *Times* was the fulcrum of Moon’s mission to use money and media as a path to power. As James Whelan, once the newspaper’s editor and publisher, told me at the time, “They are spending a great, great deal in this country... probably more on influence and the obtaining of influence, of power, than of any organization I know of in this country, and that includes the AFL-CIO, that includes the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, that includes General Motors, that includes anybody.”

As he sought to influence America’s political agenda by pouring more than a billion dollars into media, Moon began to move among the country’s political elite: From Dwight Eisenhower ... to Strom Thurmond ... to Richard Nixon ... to Ronald Reagan, he glad-handed and corresponded with an astonishing array of major American political figures.

Michael Warder was once one of the most important Americans in the Unification movement. Warder, who had close contact with Moon for years, told me, “Moon looked on the media as almost the

**One of the primary vehicles for Moon’s rising power and influence was the daily newspaper the *Washington Times*, now back in the news because of the mysterious departure of its top executives, and facing an uncertain future**

## BUYING INFLUENCE

**The Fraser Committee's final report concluded that Moon was the "key figure" in an "international network of organizations engaged in economic and political" activities**

nervous system for a global empire. Moon was the brain, and the media are to be, or were to be, the communications vehicle for his body politic surrounding the globe."

Warder was responsible for managing *News World*, then Moon's daily newspaper in New York City. "Moon wanted total control of the media, so there would be no independent media with journalistic integrity," he said. "It would be a media totally loyal to Moon."

### **Koreagate**

Moon's troubles in America had begun in the mid-Seventies, when Minnesota Democratic Congressman Donald Fraser launched the so-called "Koreagate" investigation – in part a probe into Moon's relationship to the Korean CIA and the buying of political influence on Capitol Hill. Using its own media, Moon's organization struck back in an all-out effort to discredit Fraser.

"Moon wanted a whole series of articles going after poor Congressman Fraser, who was heading up the congressional investigations there," Warder confided. "We would assign reporters to try and dig up all the dirt we could find on Congressman Fraser, and of course I would say to Moon, 'On one hand, we're supposed to be doing this – but on the other hand, we're competing with the *New York Times*. And so there's matters of credibility here.' And he would, you know, bluster and get angry at these kinds of things and say, 'Just do what I'm ordering you to do and don't ask so many questions.'"

The Fraser Committee's final report concluded that Moon was the "key figure" in an "international network of organizations engaged in economic and political" activities. It uncovered evidence that the Moon Organization "had systematically violated U.S. tax, immigration, banking, currency, and Foreign Agents Registration Act laws," and detailed how the Korean CIA paid Moon to stage demonstrations at the United Nations and run a pro-South Korean propaganda effort.

Michael Hershman was the Fraser Committee's chief investigator. He told me, "We determined that their primary interest, at least in the United States at that time, was not religious at all, but was political. It was an attempt to gain power and influence and authority." The Fraser Committee recommended that the White House form a task force to continue to investigate Moon – but that never happened.

Perhaps the election of Ronald Reagan – hailed as the beginning of a conservative revolution – had something to do with that. In any event, Moon, a VIP guest at Reagan's inauguration, soon became a major funder of Washington's new conservative establishment.

Brent Bozell, now founder and president of the Media Research Center, was then one of the young Reagan Revolutionaries. "When the Moonies entered the political scene in the early 1980s," Bozell said, "One school of thought said...that because of their anti-communist commitment, conservatives ought to work with them."

Moon's most expensive political work involved the *Washington Times*. As former editor Whelan noted, "Washington is the most important single city in the world. If you can achieve influence, if you can achieve visibility, if you can achieve a measure of respect in Washington, then you fairly automatically are going to achieve these things in the rest of the world. There is no better agency, or entity or instrument that I know of for achieving power here or almost anywhere else – than a newspaper."

And the *Times* had an immediate impact. After all, the President of the United States said it was the first paper he read in the morning. Soon its columnists found even greater exposure on television.

"If the *Washington Times* did not carry the conservative columnists that they carry – like a Pat Buchanan, like a Bill Rusher, like a Mona Charen," Bozell said, "I wonder if the television community would be aware of them and would tap them to use them in television."

But by 1984, despite his paper's growing influence, editor James Whelan was increasingly unhappy. "When we started the paper there was never any question that it would in any fashion project the views or the agenda of Sun Myung Moon or the Unification Church – all to the contrary," said Whelan. "We said, 'Look, we are going to put a high wall in place. It is going to be a sturdy wall. And it will divide us from you.'"

But Whelan's wall of editorial independence was often breached.

"Moon himself gave direct instructions to the editors," he averred. "Who in fact calls the shots? Ultimately Moon calls the shots ..."

Whelan eventually resigned, announcing at a press conference, "The *Washington Times* has become a Moonie newspaper."

Times spokesmen said the dispute was really over money. Former *Newsweek* editor Arnaud de Borchgrave later replaced Whelan. De Borchgrave consistently denied taking orders from Moon – but the man who ran the editorial pages under de Borchgrave, William Cheshire, told a different story. "I protested to de Borchgrave," Cheshire told me. "I went up to his office when I saw this happening, I told him this was unethical, improper, unprofessional, and it ought to stop. Also, it was dumb."

Cheshire and four others resigned after de Borchgrave ordered an about-face on an editorial critical of the South Korean government. "I said, 'Arnaud, we have a problem,'" Cheshire recalled. "He said, 'What's the problem?' I said, 'The problem is you've conferred with the owners of this newspaper, come back downstairs and demanded a reversal of editorial policy on their say so.'"

Questions about control of the *Washington Times* persisted for years. Several journalists, including Lars Erik Nelson of the New York *Daily News*, called for a Justice Department investigation to determine if the paper violated the Foreign Agents Registration Act. "The Justice Department

doesn't seem to want to know, and I've never gotten a clear answer from them as to why they don't want to know," Nelson said. "They've said, 'Hmmm, that's an interesting point.' They say, 'Hmmm, we'll think about that.' And they never get back to me."

*Times* officials sent a statement in reply, noting, "The complete editorial independence of the *Washington Times* is well-known, and envied, throughout the newspaper industry."

Throughout the Reagan years, the paper gained respect and influence by lending editorial support – and money – to causes favored by the Administration. The contra forces battling the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, for example, received editorial support and money from the *Times*. Here's how it worked:

In March 1985, Oliver North wrote a top-secret memo proposing the formation of a private foundation called the Nicaraguan Freedom Fund. Its purpose was to circumvent a Congressional ban on aid to the contras. Less than two months later, the *Times* announced the birth of the Nicaraguan Freedom Fund in a front-page editorial. Editor de Borchgrave insisted he was "surprised" at the coincidence between his paper's initiative and North's secret project, but the *Times* contributed the first \$100,000 to the Fund.

Another pet project of the Reagan Administration was the Strategic Defense Initiative – SDI, or "Star Wars." It too received support from the *Times*.

"Reverend Moon's organization has been very supportive of the Strategic Defense Initiative," former Defense and Central Intelligence official Daniel Graham told me. Graham had co-produced a pro-Star Wars video that was seen on 400 television stations.

"It's called 'One Incoming,'" Graham said, "And it includes a scenario that I got Tom Clancy to write for us, and I got Charlton Heston to do the voiceover. It cost a lot of money to produce it – \$200,000 ... and

**Whelan eventually resigned, announcing at a press conference, "The *Washington Times* has become a Moonie newspaper"**

## BUYING INFLUENCE

**In the wake of the current turmoil and uncertainty at the *Washington Times*, many questions about the Unification Movement remain unanswered. But none is more pressing – or perplexing – than this: Where did all the money come from?**

I'm sure that's where the money came from to produce that movie."

Moon's media tentacles also reached into book publishing, including one called *Inquisition*, a purportedly independent investigation of Moon's 1982 tax fraud prosecution, released by the right-wing publishing house Regnery-Gateway. Its author, Carlton Sherwood, was a reporter who once worked for the *Washington Times*. (Sherwood made headlines in 2004 when he produced the controversial video *Stolen Honor: Wounds That Never Heal*, which featured interviews with American POW's in North Vietnam who complained that they had been maltreated as a direct result of Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's Fulbright Hearing Testimony in 1971.

*Inquisition* had a curious history. An obscure publishing house called Andromeda had printed it once before. The phone number listed for Andromeda was the home phone of former Reagan National Security Council official Roger Fontaine – also an ex-reporter at the *Washington Times*. But when we called Fontaine's house, his wife Judy answered and told us that the company was bankrupt and that *Inquisition* was published by Regnery-Gateway. Alfred Regnery is the head of Regnery-Gateway.

According to former *Times* editor Whelan, himself a Regnery-Gateway author, Alfred Regnery was told by Carlton Sherwood that the Moon Organization would purchase at least 100,000 copies of *Inquisition*. Alfred Regnery denied it, and although he refused an on-camera interview, Sherwood said the Unification Movement had exerted no editorial control over his book.

In the wake of the current turmoil and uncertainty at the *Washington Times*, many questions about the Unification Movement remain unanswered. But none is more pressing – or perplexing – than this: Where did all the money come from? At the time of the broadcast of the PBS Frontline film – seventeen years ago – the Moon Organization had already spent an astonishing

amount in the United States:

- more than \$800 million on the *Washington Times*;
- hundreds of millions on national periodicals;
- tens of millions on electronic media;
- at least \$40 million on New York newspapers;
- more than \$10 million on a New York publishing house;
- millions on World Media Association junkets and conferences;
- millions more on New Right organizations, including the American Freedom Coalition;
- well over \$100 million on real estate, including the New Yorker Hotel in midtown Manhattan;
- at least \$40 million on commercial fishing operations;
- and at least \$75 million on related projects...

It all added up to more than a billion dollars – at a time when most of Moon's operations in America were losing substantial sums of money. The best example was the *Washington Times* itself, which was then losing as much as 50 million dollars a year.

What did all the money buy Reverend Moon? Like many others, he refused to talk to me for the film. But in a Church-sponsored film, Reverend Moon in America – one of the many media efforts he spun out in the Eighties – he had this to say:

"Now whether positively or negatively, America knows me – and it happened quickly. At least I have America's attention. Because of that, I will be able to tell the people the truth of God, the new revelation. The worst treatment America could give me is to ignore me. Now I can preach the truth. "

### **Politicians targeted**

Moon and his money became a force to be reckoned with – in large part because, as award-winning investigative reporter Robert Parry has written, his daily mouthpiece the *Times* "targeted American politicians

of the center and left with journalistic attacks – sometimes questioning their sanity, as happened with Democratic presidential nominees Michael Dukakis and Al Gore. Those themes then resonate through the broader right-wing echo chamber and into the mainstream media.”

Exactly how much money the *Washington Times* itself loses annually is still a closely held secret – as is the specific source of the funds. But it’s safe to assume that Moon’s American money comes from overseas – as he himself told the Senate Judiciary Committee in June, 1984:

“Several hundred million dollars have been poured into America, because this nation will decide the destiny of the world, these contributions are primarily coming from overseas.”

But where precisely does the money come from? As I first reported in my PBS Frontline documentary *The Resurrection of Reverend Moon*, most of Moon’s money comes from Japan.

One early Moon patron was a man named Ryoichi Sasakawa, once one of the richest men and the chief political brokers in Japan. Sasakawa’s money came from his monopoly on the motorboat racing industry. (Legalized gambling on the sport is a multi-billion dollar a year industry in Japan.) According to author Pat Choate, whose book *Agents of Influence* examined Japan’s effort to shape America’s policy and politics, “When Reverend Moon expanded his operations inside Japan, he asked Sasakawa to be one of the principal advisers to his Church inside Japan. Many of their operations – the Sasakawa operations, the Moon operations – seem to parallel each other. They operate in many of the same ways – giving away money, a great deal of attention to media and media organizations, the establishment of think tanks and other policy organizations that operate across national borders, and the maintenance of a very right wing conservative focus.”

In addition, Moon’s Japanese fund-rais-

ing machinery is another central source of his financial might in the United States.

Substantial sums appear to be the result of so-called ‘spiritual sales’. The church concentrates on attracting older people, particularly women, and then pressures them to turn over their assets or take large loans against them, turning the money over to the church. Many are specifically told to donate money so it may be used for the *Washington Times*.

With all that money coming into the US from abroad, who controls what is done with it? That same question was asked – and answered – decades ago by the U.S. Congress in the so-called Fraser Report, the result of Minnesota Democratic Congressman Donald Fraser’s “Koreagate” investigation, in part a probe into Moon’s relationship to the Korean CIA and the buying of political influence on Capitol Hill:

“Moon provides considerably more than spiritual guidance to his worldwide organization. The statements and testimony of former members and officials in Moon’s Organization, evidence gleaned from internal UC publications, memos, other documents, and financial records all show that Moon exercises substantial control over temporal matters. These include the transfer of funds from one organization to another, personnel changes and allocations, the structure and operation of fundraising teams, the timing and nature of political demonstrations, and the marketing of goods produced by the organization’s businesses. As in any organization so large and complex, there are advisers, lieutenants, and managers with varying degrees of influence and authority to speak and act on behalf of the organization; however, there is every indication that regardless of the title he might or might not hold in any one corporate structure, Moon can and often does make the final decision on a course of action.”

The findings of the Fraser committee further describe the organization’s control this way:

(1) The UC and numerous other reli-

**With all that money coming into the US from abroad, who controls what is done with it? That same question was asked – and answered – decades ago by the U.S. Congress in the so-called Fraser Report**

## BUYING INFLUENCE

**Washington is the most important single city in the world. If you can achieve influence, if you can achieve visibility, if you can achieve a measure of respect in Washington, then you fairly automatically are going to achieve these things in the rest of the world ...”**

gious and secular organizations headed by Sun Myung Moon constitute essentially one international organization. This organization depends heavily upon the interchangeability of its components and upon its ability to move personnel and financial assets freely across international boundaries and between businesses and nonprofit organizations.

(2) The Moon Organization attempts to achieve goals outlined by Sun Myung Moon, who has substantial control over the economic, political, and spiritual activities undertaken by the organization in pursuit of those goals.

The Fraser Committee’s final report said Moon was the “key figure” in an “international network of organizations engaged in economic and political” activities. The Committee uncovered evidence that the Moon Organization “had systematically violated U.S. tax, immigration, banking, currency, and Foreign Agents Registration Act laws.” It also detailed how the Korean CIA paid Moon to stage demonstrations at the United Nations and run a pro-South Korean propaganda effort.

“We determined that their primary interest, at least in the United States at that time, was not religious at all, but was political,” said Michael Hershman, the Fraser Committee’s chief investigator. “It was an attempt to gain power and influence and authority.”

The Fraser Committee recommended that the White House form a task force to continue to investigate Moon – but that never happened.

Besides the money ‘invested’ in the Washington Times, Moon also invested in paid speaking fees to political figures, such

as former President George H.W. Bush, who appeared at Moon-organized functions in the United States, Asia and South America. (At the 1996 launch of Moon’s South American newspaper, Bush hailed Moon as “the man with the vision.”) In 2004, he was even given space in the Senate’s Dirksen building for a coronation of himself as “savior, Messiah, Returning Lord and True Parent.” (*The Hill*, June 22, 2004)

Now that the investments have paid off for him and his family is being split apart in a struggle to succeed him, don’t be surprised to see Moon & Co. avoid a nasty succession battle at the *Times*, and instead simply fold the money-sucking daily... But even if the *Washington Times* – Moon’s most expensive political project was a newspaper – does soon become history, history will also “surely record that Moon’s \$3 billion-plus investment succeeded in buying a remarkable degree of Washington influence – and legal protection – for his dubious political/business/religious empire.”

As former *Washington Times* editor and publisher James Whelan concluded, “Washington is the most important single city in the world. If you can achieve influence, if you can achieve visibility, if you can achieve a measure of respect in Washington, then you fairly automatically are going to achieve these things in the rest of the world. There is no better agency, or entity or instrument that I know of for achieving power here or almost anywhere else – than a newspaper.” **CT**

*Rory O’Connor’s latest book is “Shock Jocks: Hate Speech and Talk Radio: America’s Ten Worst Hate Talkers and the Progressive Alternatives (Altnet Books)*

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# Have Israel's spies infiltrated your airport?

**Jonathan Cook** on some strange happenings at Johannesburg's international airport

**S**outh Africa recently deported an Israeli airline official following allegations that Israel's secret police, the Shin Bet, had infiltrated Johannesburg's international airport in an effort to gather information on South African citizens, especially black and Muslim travellers.

The move by the South African government followed an investigation by local TV showing an undercover reporter being illegally interrogated by an official with El Al, Israel's national carrier, in a public area of Johannesburg's OR Tambo airport.

The programme also featured testimony from Jonathan Garb, a former El Al guard, who claimed that the airline company had been a front for the Shin Bet in South Africa for many years. Of the footage of the undercover reporter's questioning, he commented: "Here is a secret service operating above the law in South Africa. We pull the wool over everyone's eyes. We do exactly what we want. The local authorities do not know what we are doing."

The Israeli foreign ministry is reported to have sent a team to South Africa to try to defuse the diplomatic crisis after the government in Johannesburg threatened to deport all of El Al's security staff.

Mr Garb's accusations have been supported by an investigation by the regulator for South Africa's private security industries. They have also been confirmed by human

rights groups in Israel, which report that Israeli security staff are carrying out racial profiling at many airports around the world, apparently out of sight of local authorities.

Concern in South Africa about the activities of El Al staff has been growing since August, when South Africa's leading investigative news show, *Carte Blanche*, went undercover to test Mr Garb's allegations.

A hidden camera captured an El Al official in the departure hall claiming to be from "airport security" and demanding that the undercover reporter hand over his passport or ID as part of "airport regulations". When the reporter protested that he was not flying but waiting for a friend, El Al's security manager, identified as Golan Rice, arrived to interrogate him further. Mr Rice then warned him that he was in a restricted area and must leave.

Mr Garb commented on the show: "What we are trained is to look for the immediate threat – the Muslim guy. You can think he is a suicide bomber, he is collecting information. The crazy thing is that we are profiling people racially, ethnically and even on religious grounds ... This is what we do."

Mr Garb and two other fired workers have told the South African media that Shin Bet agents routinely detain Muslim and black passengers, a claim that has ignited controversy in a society still suffering with the legacy of decades of apartheid rule.

**Hidden camera captured an El Al official in the departure hall claiming to be from "airport security" and demanding that the undercover reporter hand over his passport or ID as part of "airport regulations"**

## ABOVE THE LAW?

**The Israeli Embassy in South Africa declined to discuss evidence that it, rather than El Al, had licensed guns issued to the airline's security managers**

Suspect individuals, the former workers say, are held in an annex room, where they are interrogated, often on matters unrelated to airport security, and can be subjected to strip searches while their luggage is taken apart. Clandestine searches of their belongings and laptops are also carried out to identify useful documents and information.

All of this is done in violation of South African law, which authorises only the police, armed forces or personnel appointed by the transport minister to carry out searches.

The former staff also accuse El Al of smuggling weapons – licensed to the local Israeli embassy – into the airport for use by the secret agents.

Mr Garb went public after he was dismissed over a campaign he led for better pay and medical benefits for El Al staff.

A South African Jew, he said he was recruited 19 years ago by the Shin Bet. “We were trained at a secret camp [in Israel] where they train Israeli special forces and they train you how to use handguns, sub-machine guns and in unarmed combat.”

He added that he was assigned to “armed security” in the early 1990s. “Armed security is being undercover, carrying a weapon, a handgun and at that time as well, sounds crazy but we carried Samsonite briefcases with an Uzi submachine gun in it.”

Mr Garb claimed to have profiled 40,000 people for Israel over the past 20 years, including Virginia Tilley, a Middle East expert who is the chief researcher at South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council. The think tank recently published a report accusing Israel of apartheid and colonialism in the Palestinian territories.

Ms Tilley confirmed that she had been detained at the airport by El Al staff and separated from her luggage. Mr Garb said that during this period an agent “photocopied all [her] documentation and then he forwarded it on to Israel” – Mr Garb believes for use by the Shin Bet.

Israeli officials have refused to comment on the allegations. A letter produced by Mr Garb – signed by Roz Bukris, El Al's general

manager in South Africa – suggests that he was employed by the Shin Bet rather than the airline. Ms Bukris, according to the programme, refused to confirm or deny the letter's validity.

The Israeli Embassy in South Africa declined to discuss evidence that it, rather than El Al, had licensed guns issued to the airline's security managers. Questioned by Ynet, Israel's largest news website, about the deportation of the airline official, Yossi Levy, an Israeli foreign ministry spokesman, said he could not “comment on security matters”.

A report published in 2007 by two Israeli human rights organisations, the Nazareth-based Arab Association for Human Rights and the Centre Against Racism, found that Israeli airline staff used racial profiling at most major airports around the world, subjecting Arab and Muslim passengers to discriminatory and degrading treatment in violation both of international law and the host country's laws.

“Our research showed that the checks conducted by El Al at foreign airports had all the hallmarks of Shin Bet interrogations,” said Mohammed Zeidan, the director of the Human Rights Association. “Usually the questions were less about the safety of the flight and more aimed at gathering information on the political activities or sympathies of the passengers.”

The human rights groups approached four international airports – in New York, Paris, Vienna and Geneva – where passengers said they had been subjected to discriminatory treatment, to ask under what authority the Israeli security services were operating. The first two airports refused to respond, while Vienna and Geneva said it was not possible to oversee El Al's procedures.

“It is remarkable that these countries make no effort to supervise the actions of Israeli security personnel present on their territory, particularly in light of the discriminatory and humiliating procedures they apply,” the report states. **CT**

**Jonathan Cook** is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest books are “*Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East*” (Pluto Press) and “*Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair*” (Zed Books). His website is [www.jkcook.net](http://www.jkcook.net)

# War is NOT peace, Mr President

**Norman Solomon** wonders what we should make of a Nobel Peace Prize-winning president who won't even ban land mines

**E**loquence in Oslo cannot change the realities of war.

As President Obama neared the close of his Nobel address, he called for “the continued expansion of our moral imagination.” Yet his speech was tightly circumscribed by the policies that his oratory labored to justify.

Lofty rationales easily tell us that warfare is striving for the noble goal of peace. But the rationales scarcely intersect with actual war. The oratory sugarcoats the poisons, helping to kill hope in the name of it.

A few months ago, when I visited an Afghan office for women's empowerment, staffers took me to a pilot project in one of Kabul's poorest neighborhoods. There, women were learning small-scale business skills while also gaining personal strength and mutual support.

Two-dozen women, who ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s, talked with enthusiasm about the workshops. They were desperate to change their lives. When it was time to leave, I had a question: What should I tell people in the United States, if they ask what Afghan women want most of all?

After several women spoke, the translator summed up. “They all said that the first priority is peace.”

In Afghanistan, after 30 years under the murderous twin shadows of poverty and

war, the only lifeline is peace.

From President Obama, we hear that peace is the ultimate goal. But “peace” is a fixture on a strategic horizon that keeps moving as the military keeps marching.

Just a couple of days before Obama stepped to the podium in Oslo, the general running the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan spoke to a congressional committee in Washington about the president's recent pledge to begin withdrawal of U.S. troops in July 2011. “I don't believe that is a deadline at all,” Stanley McChrystal said.

War is not peace. It never has been. It never will be.

Actual policy always, in the real world, profoundly trumps even the best rhetoric. And so, for instance, when President Obama's Nobel speech proclaimed that “America cannot act alone” and called for “standards that govern the use of force,” the ringing declaration clashed with the announcement last month that he will not sign the international Mine Ban Treaty.

As Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams pointed out, “Obama's position on land mines calls into question his expressed views on multilateralism, respect for international humanitarian law and disarmament. How can he, with total credibility, lead the world to nuclear disarmament when his own country won't give up even land mines?”

**When President Obama's Nobel speech proclaimed that “America cannot act alone” and called for “standards that govern the use of force,” the ringing declaration clashed with the announcement last month that he will not sign the international Mine Ban Treaty**

## WORDS & ACTIONS

I think of the people I met and saw in Kabul who are missing limbs, and the countless more whose lives have been shattered by war

At the outset of his speech in Oslo, the president spoke of his “acute sense of the cost of armed conflict.” Well, there’s acute and then there’s acute. I think of the people I met and saw in Kabul who are missing limbs, and the countless more whose lives have been shattered by war.

In the name of pragmatism, Obama spoke of “the world as it is” and threw a cloak of justification over the grisly escalation in Afghanistan by insisting that “war is sometimes necessary” – but generalities do nothing to mitigate the horrors of war being endured by others.

President Obama accepted the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize while delivering – to the world as it is – a pro-war speech. The context instantly turned the speech’s insights into flackery for more war. **CT**

*Norman Solomon is co-chair of the national Healthcare Not Warfare campaign, launched by Progressive Democrats of America. He is the author of a dozen books including “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.”*

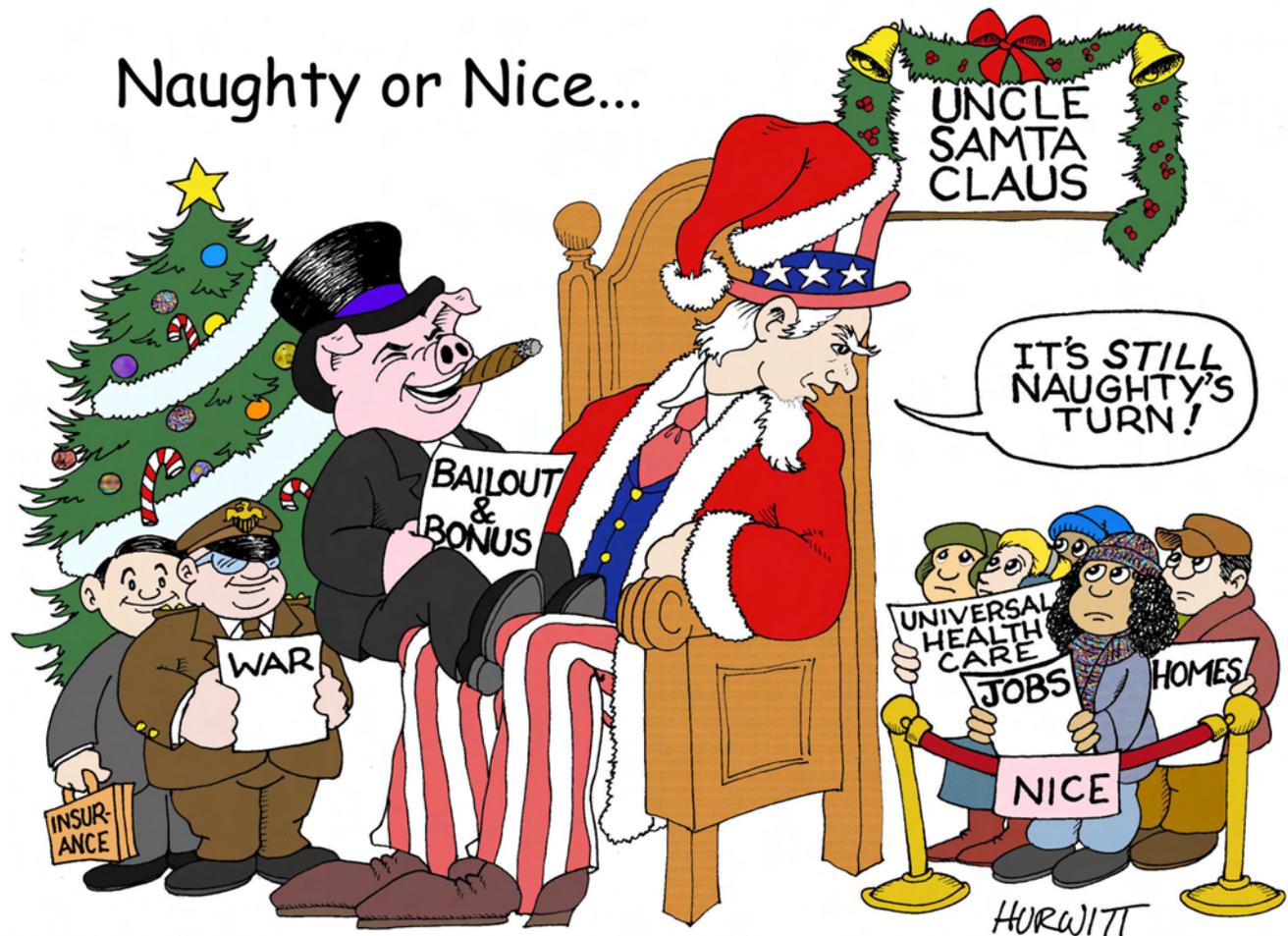
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## HURWITT’S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



# How dare you clean up our mess?

Why do the righties rage so much about Obama; he's just clearing up the mess they left behind, wonders **David Michael Green**

One of the few things that irritates me more than Barack Obama is Barack Obama's critics. Or, at least, some of them. I'm one of his biggest un-fans, and in that sense I join legions of progressives heartsick in watching this right-wing president either doing nothing at all, or doing nothing at all that we ever would want.

But, of course, Obama's biggest opposition comes from the lunatics on the right, who basically hate him for what is essentially the crime of not being Republican. Given that his policies are so similar to George W. Bush's, I really think that's it – even more than any race-based vitriol.

That's fine, in principle. Since Obama sends me ballistic with enormous frequency, I can hardly begrudge them the same privilege.

Unless, of course, I were to be hypocritical.

Which is perhaps the single most nauseating attribute of our good friends on the regressive right. You know the rules. One set of sexual standards for us, another for them behind closed doors. Big thumping militarist patriotism when our kids go off to war, rather less when it's their turn. Itsy-bitsy small government ideology for the lil' folk, Washington as a great big candy-covered sugar teat for them. Etc., etc.

Nowhere does this astonishingly bra-

zen hypocrisy manifest itself more plainly nowadays than in the criticisms of Obama from the right. And nowhere can you find more ridiculous and more historically myopic claims than from these folk (another favorite trait of theirs). It is as if we're supposed to believe – which pretty much all of the right's regresso-bots actually seem to – that history began on January 20th of this year. Hey, no wonder they're so angry! It was all just dandy until Obama came in and wrecked everything in sight!

The biggest claim of this sort concerns deficit spending, of course. I must say, I'm glad people are worried about this. The amount of debt that we're currently handing off to our children is astronomical, and what's worse, it's rising rapidly. All that said, there are just a few inconsistencies in this line of attack that are more than just a bit irritating.

To begin with, where the hell have these people been? While the deficits currently being wracked up are huge, they are only dangerous and they are only onerous because of the mountain of existing debt onto which they're being added. They are the proverbial straws breaking the camel's back.

American government has been running in the red for eons, but it took the regressive movement coming to power in order to turn those debts into killer quantities. The

**While the deficits currently being wracked up are huge, they are only dangerous and they are only onerous because of the mountain of existing debt onto which they're being added. They are the proverbial straws breaking the camel's back**

## MEMORY LAPSE

**Then the Little Bush comes along and does Reagan one better. He inherited the greatest budget surplus in American history and instantly turned it into the greatest deficit in history. Nice work!**

beloved Saint Reagan pioneered the path here, by tripling the national debt in his eight years in office, and doing so through the combination of giant tax cuts for the wealthy (and thus equally giant revenue cuts for the government), along with massive military spending increases. Woo-hoo! It's a party, everybody!

It didn't take magic to figure out what the result would be. In fact, it took magic to imagine it could be anything different. Which is why George Bush (not the Satan one, but the father of the Satan one) called it "voodoo economics". At least that's what he called it when he was running against Reagan for the 1980 presidential nomination of the Precambrian Party. When he lost that battle and desperately wanted instead to become Reagan's running mate, he somehow stopped making that particular critique. Magically, Reagan's unchanged plan rapidly became perfectly sound economics for vice presidential nominee Bush. You might call that one of the greatest sell-outs of the public interest in all of American history. Indeed, since he did it in pursuit of his own personal interests, you might even call it an act of treason. But then, of course, you would have to be a sentient human being to do so, which lets out just about all of the nice people over on the right. So Reagan gets a pass.

Then the Little Bush comes along and does Reagan one better. He inherited the greatest budget surplus in American history and instantly turned it into the greatest deficit in history. Nice work! And he did it

the old fashioned way, handing enormous tax relief to the already wealthy – and equally robust 'revenue relief' to the federal treasury – while spending huge chunks of cash on the military. Bush also figured out a great way to funnel tons of money to his pals in the pharmaceutical industry, through a prescription drug bill which just incidentally also happened to provide a small benefit for American seniors. The cost for that puppy was entirely and completely unfunded in the legislation (can you say, "not deficit neutral"?). The Bush people lied to their own party in Congress about it when they promised that the total bill would not exceed \$400 billion in cost over ten years time. Then they told the administration's Medicare actuary, who knew the truth, that they would fire him if he testified before Congress. Now, a couple years later, the bill is priced at one trillion bucks over ten years. And, again, every one of those trillion dollars is completely unfunded. Which is to say, borrowed.

Contrast this to what the Democrats are doing on healthcare today. It is, to my mind, very much an incomplete bill, at best, and possibly a prescription for ruin if insurance companies go on a pricing binge after it's passed, which they've actually already begun doing before it's passed. But, whatever its other serious flaws, it make a fairly earnest attempt at fully paying for itself, and – a few gimmicky budget tricks aside – largely succeeds. According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the bill now being considered by the Sen-

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ate would actually reduce the annual federal deficit slightly.

And yet regresso-atavists are apoplectic at the giant damage that Obama's health-care bill will do to the deficit! Even though it won't. And they were silent about the major damage that Bush's bill did to the deficit! Even though it did. Nor did we hear boo from them as Bush doubled the size of the national debt in eight years. Somehow, borrowing is only a problem when a Democrat does it. In fact, it would appear that borrowing is even a problem when a Democrat doesn't do it. Go figure. Maybe it's the Democrat part that turns out to be problematic. I'm just thinkin' out loud here...

Of course, that's just good old fashioned regressive hypocrisy at work, though the outrage on the right is insulting for another reason as well. People can say whatever they want about Barack Obama. (And, clearly, that's exactly what they do – without the slightest regard to fact.) But you have to be desperately self-deceiving to believe that he came to office wanting to start off his presidency by spending \$800 billion on some hodgepodge stimulus bill, and wanting to become the new owner of American automobile, insurance and banking companies. I don't think Obama has any more desire to gobble up the American private sector than did Herbert Hoover. Why would he? It's not like he's making money off the deal. And if he did want to own corporations, why would he be grabbing only companies that are such total train-wrecks?

How deluded do you have to be to think that the president of the United States has some sort of bizarre jones for owning imploding corporations? And how absurdly unbalanced do you have to be to believe it's all just a coincidence that it's happening right now? And that the only companies that the government is buying are those which have been dropped from 150 story buildings and were inches from the ground at the time that Obama stepped in?

This is historical myopia to the point of psychosis. The lunatics on the right have

completely divorced Obama's actions from the context in which they took place. It's like pretending there's no difference between murder and self-defense. Perhaps they've not heard, but despite the fact that they both involve killing another person, one is done without justification and the other is completely justified and even highly admired.

Like so much that goes on in Starboardville, it makes no sense whatsoever. Unless, of course, you realize that the real logic is actually about avoiding sense. Hence the tenacious embrace of dogma, the facts be damned. In this particular case, what the facts show is that regressive economic policies drove the economy off the cliff, and are still now causing enormous pain for huge numbers of people worldwide. How unbelievably cheeky is it, therefore, for the Neanderthal Set to come along and trash the very people who have rescued the economy from the mega-crisis they themselves bequeathed to all of us? You'd think that after all the damage they're responsible for creating these nice folks would have the decency to go crawl off into the closet and hide for a century or two. Ah, but that would be to misunderstand profoundly the movement we're dealing with here.

The facts show that regressive policies drove the economy over the cliff, alright. And what the facts also show is that the only thing that prevented it from smashing headlong into the ground 300 feet below was the federal government's intervention. Meanwhile, what was the right's prescription to deal with the outrageous mess they themselves had made?

That's a third way in which their critiques of the current government's policies are so obscene. What is their alternative? Near as I can tell, it's do nothing. Or, give some additional huge tax breaks to the wealthy – which also means do nothing, but while adding even more to the national debt.

Isn't it bad enough that these lovely folks and their lovely policies have wrecked

**This is historical myopia to the point of psychosis. The lunatics on the right have completely divorced Obama's actions from the context in which they took place. It's like pretending there's no difference between murder and self-defense**

## MEMORY LAPSE

**Obama seems incapable of mounting an effective communications strategy, incapable of advocating for his policy preferences, and incapable even of defending his administration against the most scurrilous and deceitful of attacks**

the country? Isn't even worse that they get so agitated at the people trying to repair the damage that they foam at the mouth in rage? Yes and yes. But it's a still greater crime yet that the folks shredding the folks fixing have absolutely no solutions of their own to offer as alternatives to the nightmare they've created.

I actually gets worse from there, however. It isn't a nightmare they've created, but rather nightmares. The economy is only Problem One. Then there are the wars, the environment, education, infrastructure, debt, human rights and lots more.

We are talking here about a country deep in multiple crises. Maybe Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Roosevelt had more on their plates when they assumed the presidency. Maybe. But if they did, only they did. Obama came into office with the country just about going off the rails in just about every way possible. And the people who gave him – and us – these disasters have done nothing but criticize him in the fiercest manner from the get-go.

Worse is that their reckless critiques are gaining traction everyday, and the Obama presidency is sinking rapidly. This is chiefly

because Obama seems incapable of mounting an effective communications strategy, incapable of advocating for his policy preferences, and incapable even of defending his administration against the most scurrilous and deceitful of attacks.

That adds salt to the already grievous wound, but worst of all is that he really is one of them. A close examination of his policies quickly reveals that they run the gamut from regressive economics to regressive foreign policy to regressive human rights and beyond.

Maybe that's why the president has such a hard time defending himself from the insane and obscene critiques of the hypocritical, historically myopic, and alternative-lacking regressive right. He's merely the kinder, gentler version of them.

Lucky us. Once we had a choice between Tweedledee and Tweedledum. Now it's Tweedle-Destruction and Tweedle-Disaster. **CT**

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

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# Wall Street meltdown myth bites the dust

A year after the big crash, **Sam Pizzigati** wonders what happened to pay reform on Wall Street

**G**reat minds have been searching, ever since last fall's financial sector meltdown, for an antidote to the wildly excessive Wall Street paydays that made that meltdown inevitable. That search, after over a year, still hasn't generated anything close to meaningful Wall Street pay reform.

And that has to be puzzling many, if not most, average Americans. The problem on Wall Street, after all, doesn't seem to be all that complicated. Neither does the solution. Wall Streeters did terrible things — they gutted the pensions and savings of millions — because they were rushing to hit massive pay jackpots. To prevent that greedy rushing in the future, we ought to limit those jackpots.

And Congress could do that — by not letting any banker getting bailout dollars make more than the President of the United States. Or by denying government subsidies or tax deductions to firms that pay their top execs over 25 or 50 or 100 times what their workers make. Or by taxing big bonuses at 90 percent.

Various bills that take these approaches have actually been sitting in Congress, all this year. Why aren't these bills going anywhere? America's big banks, predictably enough, oppose them. But so do many of Wall Street's mainstream critics. Both these camps have been bending over backwards

to steer Congress away from the notion that rewards on Wall Street need serious downsizing.

The banks, by and large, simply deny that these rewards have had any significant impact on how the movers and shakers of high finance behave. In the end, they argue, "the market" will always punish power suits who take reckless risks — and the power-suits know it.

And if those power-suits didn't know it before last year's financial meltdown, the apologists continue, they know it now, thanks to last year's nosedives at Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers.

These nosedives left top execs at Bear Stearns and Lehman holding millions of shares of worthless stock. The Lehman collapse wiped nearly a billion dollars — \$931 million, to be exact — off the personal net worth of Lehman CEO Richard Fuld. Bear Stearns CEO James Cayne saw the total value of his personal stock holdings drop by \$900 million.

In effect, apologists for Wall Street's compensation status quo argue, the market system worked. The truly reckless paid a price for their recklessness. So leave that system alone.

Wall Street's mainstream critics don't want to leave that system alone. They believe "the market," left to its own devices, does not adequately discipline the reck-

**With some modifications, the Obama administration appears to be carrying forward the ugly practices of the Bush and Clinton imperial presidencies, hardly the "change" for which the American people had hoped**

## TROUBLED ECONOMY

**Our economic system is dominated by a tiny crust of super-rich individuals, bailing themselves out with taxpayer money while playing deaf to an exploding social crisis**

less. We need reforms, they believe, that tie executive rewards to “performance” that boosts “long-term shareholder value.”

With such reforms in place, their argument goes, Wall Streeters would have no incentive to take reckless risks — and lawmakers would have no reason to mess with capping the rewards that go to Wall Streeters.

Last month, the most eminent among Wall Street’s mainstream critics — Harvard Law’s Lucian Bebchuk — released a report that takes on Wall Street’s hardline defenders and their claim that the reckless, thanks to the market, have truly suffered for their sins.

This new report powerfully demolishes that hardline claim. But the report, read closely, may just as powerfully undermine the mainstream case against caps.

Bebchuk’s new paper revolves around what really happened, on the executive pay front, at Bear Stearns and Lehman. Top execs at these two banks, Bebchuk and his two Harvard co-authors show, did not lose their shirts when the banks crashed. In fact, the top execs at both Bear and Lehman left the crash scene in fine financial fiddle. Spectacularly fine fiddle.

Between 2000 and 2008, the top five executives at Bear Stearns and the top five execs at Lehman together pocketed just under \$2.5 billion. About half a billion of that came from annual cash bonuses. They picked up the rest selling off the shares of bank stock they had received as “performance” incentives.

But what about those \$900 million “losses” that the CEOs of Bear Stearns and Lehman suffered? Those losses existed only on paper. They represented the difference between the pre- and post-crash value of the Bear and Lehman stock the two CEOs had left in their portfolios when their banks tumbled over the cliff.

In real cash, the two CEOs — despite their epic failures — came out way ahead. For his labors between 2000 and 2008, CEO Cayne of Bear Stearns ended up \$388

million to the richer. CEO Fuld of Lehman walked away with \$541 million.

So what do mainstream reformers propose, to prevent a repeat of the Bear Stearns and Lehman fiascos? These mainstreamers want execs to get more of their “incentive” pay in stock and less in bonus cash — and have to wait a number of years before they can cash out their stock incentive awards.

### **Safe from recklessness?**

If these executives took more pay in stock, the mainstreamers hold, they and their shareholders would share the same self-interest. So “aligned” with shareholders, the executives wouldn’t do anything to jeopardize “long-term shareholder value.” We would all be safe from recklessness.

But these reforms, *New York Times* analyst Louise Strong points out, had already been put in place at Bear and Lehman — before the two firms crashed.

“Both firms required executives to wait several years before selling their stock,” her report on Bebchuk’s new paper notes. “Both firms paid heavily in stock.”

These requirements, in practical terms, did nothing to discourage short-term recklessness, mainly because Bear Stearns and Lehman awarded massive stock incentives to their executives year in and year out.

Execs at Bear and Lehman did have to wait five years before they could cash out the stock incentives they received in any one year. But after their first five years on the job, they ended up with stock awards they could cash out every year. That gave them plenty of incentive to play risky games that could recklessly jack up their short-term share price.

Bebchuk, in his new paper, acknowledges as much. Having executives wait five years before they cash out, he notes, isn’t go to stop long-serving executives “from placing a significant weight on short-term prices.”

A better approach, Bebchuk suggests, might be the Goldman Sachs policy that requires executives to hold 75 percent of

the incentive stock they receive until they retire. But Goldman Sachs execs get the bulk of their windfalls from annual cash bonuses, not stock awards, and annual cash bonuses give execs just as much incentive to think short-term as annual stock awards.

That's why bolder mainstreamers – like Bebchuk – also want firms to be able to “claw back” bonus awards based on short-term gains that later evaporate.

But clawbacks have their limitations. You can easily, for instance, claw back a single year's bonus based on a specific accounting fraud. But you can't so easily claw back the long-term damage that a greedy rush for quick profits – and big bonuses – can do to innocent bystanders.

And top executives can do this damage while appearing to enhance “long-term shareholder value.” The execs at Bear Stearns and Lehman did just that. Year after year, for the better part of a decade, they enhanced shareholder value. Between 2000 and 2007, they quadrupled their bank share prices.

The bottom line: We need more protection from Wall Street greed than the “long-term shareholder value” reform standard can provide us. Americans on Main Street understand that. Why can't Wall Street's mainstream reformers? **CT**

*Sam Pizzigati is editor of TooMuch Online – [www.toomuchonline.org](http://www.toomuchonline.org) – and author of “Greed And Good” (Apex Press)*

**These companies wield absolute power over political and social life: their tremendous wealth enables them to purchase politicians and army generals, while keeping certain topics in Congress “off the table”**

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# Life in a mahogany bubble

Fred Reed brings back a few lessons from the outskirts of Houston

**These girls were not the shiftless reprehensibles beloved of conservative politicians. They were pulling their weight as best they might. It was just hard going**

**T**he remote outskirts of Houston stretch forever across featureless land under gray skies, endless parking lots mostly empty, nasty malls, elevated highways roaring and almost uncrossable by pedestrians, of whom there are almost none. It reminded me of hell designed by a concrete manufacturer. Highrise office buildings erupt like square thumbs, one like another, home to god knows who or what. It is chilly.

For embarrassing reasons we needn't explore, I have just spent five nights in an isolated hotel in this cement waste. Nice enough place, friendly people – Texas being Texas – on one side of a parking lot. Everything in these parts is on one side of a parking lot, or in the middle of one. Across the asphalt in an undistinguished building, beneath the howl and blatt of the elevated highway, preposterously, was a gorgeous Italian restaurant, all lovely dark wood and good design. I could never figure out what it was doing there. For five days I oscillated between wretched television in my room and this improbable elegance.

Business was slow, as the restaurant had just opened. On long empty afternoons I was usually the only customer. At night things picked up.

When trapped in a small world, you get to know people. A couple of waitresses in their early twenties, white, high-school

grads I'd guess, waited. Customers would appear later. We chatted. They reminded me of people I had grown up with in the rural South. Their grammar ran to "If he don't come by three...." They are not bad people, nor bad citizens. None descends to the moral level of a congressman. But they are not polished.

Lives at the low end of things run to the complex. One had two children by an earlier husband, now in the slam for assault and robbery, and a third by a boyfriend whom she planned to marry. She spoke with pride of her sprats. Her three-year-old knew her letters and colors and could count to twenty and learned her story books by heart in nothing flat – indicating that her mother was reading to her.

Strange as it may seem, intelligence exists outside of Swarthmore, unschooled mothers are not necessarily bad mothers, schooled ones frequently are, and grammar does not always cohabit with responsibility. These girls were not the shiftless reprehensibles beloved of conservative politicians. They were pulling their weight as best they might. It was just hard going.

Hour after hour of nursing a Bud at the empty bar, watching the drizzle on the parking lot. Back to the room and the television. You learn a lot about professional wrestling under these circumstances. The notion that we evolved from great apes gains plausibil-

ity, although one comes to suspect that it was not a large step. Apparently there is a new form of this athletic soap opera involving folding chairs and metal ladders in the ring. Large primates in Halloween masks hit each other with the chairs and climb up the ladder to jump on each other. The purpose of this is not clear. I don't think I'm making it up, unless the waitresses were adding mushroom juice to the Bud.

Being dropped into the bubble was strange after a week in Washington. In our nation's curious capital, people know nothing of uneducated young waitresses who juggle long hours and children, without having even one illegal nanny. DC is a world of secure jobs and money, where everyone has been to university, often to a Calvin Klein universities like Harvard, and brains in the ninety-ninth percentile seem unremarkable. We are making three hundred grand a year; why can't they? This otherworldliness accounts I think for a certain surreal quality to Washington's debates. For people with high-end Blue Cross, health care has something to do with Keynes and free enterprise and ideological catfights. For a young mother with a sick kid and no money, it doesn't. But Washington doesn't know this. Let them eat cake, but is there cake?

#### Where are the people?

Twice I went by public bus to Houston's center. To reach the bus stop I walked and walked and walked across bleak parking lots with few cars and occasional chain burger chutes. I almost never saw a human. The bus then ran along a highway through this blasted heath to a region of towering blocky office buildings downtown. Architectural gigantism seemed to rule. People were few, traffic light. I wondered whether the citizens were abandoning Houston. Such people as I found were extraordinarily agreeable and helpful, Texas being Texas. Civility and concrete, with wet snow.

On a weekend night there occurred in the restaurant what I believe to have been

the convention of a black scholarship fund. The crowd grew, starting in late afternoon. I wasn't the only paleface, but it was a near thing.

In Texas, as in the South in general, relations between the races are greatly more amiable than in the North. Certainly in the Yankee Capital there exists a self-consciousness, a sort of invisible glass wall between the colors. At a reception on the Hill you see black columnists and such, be-suited and be-tied and practicing white manners. It doesn't look right, somehow. I don't think their hearts are in it.

In the bubble it was "Whuzzup, bro?" Socially, when you get away from the Crips and the Bloods, blacks are warm and funny and idiosyncratic, and splendid company. A friend says, "They burn at a higher emotional temperature than we do." I think so. When they apply to whites words like "stiff" and "uptight," it is description, not vituperation.

The bands showed up. There were three of them, the musicians being as far as I could tell entirely black, and all jazz. The third seemed (I couldn't see that well in the dimness) to have twelve or fifteen instruments, thirty of them being horns, and was just flat dynamite. I ingested shrimp from the buffet amid explosions of horns and a great keyboard and wished that there were more of it in the country. American music lost something when it went so heavily to small-band stuff. The big bands croaked, blues became museum music like harpsichords, and, well, it wasn't a good thing.

Back to the room. More professional wrestling, hulking beeves pirouetting in a sordid ballet, thump, wham, whack. The quality of television would be much improved if they succeeded in killing each other, but they never quite manage it. **CT**

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

**For people with high-end Blue Cross, health care has something to do with Keynes and free enterprise and ideological catfights. For a young mother with a sick kid and no money, it doesn't**

# Yeswecanistan

**William Blum** can't understand why the lefties are getting so upset now that their 'peace candidate' has morphed into a 'war president'

The important issue is the continuation and escalation of the American war in Afghanistan, based on the myth that the individuals we label "Taliban" are indistinguishable from those who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, whom we usually label "al Qaeda".

All the crying from the left about how Obama "the peace candidate" has now become "a war president" ... Whatever are they talking about? Here's what I wrote in this report in August 2008, during the election campaign:

"We find Obama threatening, several times, to attack Iran if they don't do what the United States wants them to do nuclear-wise; threatening more than once to attack Pakistan if their anti-terrorist policies are not tough enough or if there would be a regime change in the nuclear-armed country not to his liking; calling for a large increase in US troops and tougher policies for Afghanistan; wholly and unequivocally embracing Israel as if it were the 51st state."

Why should anyone be surprised at Obama's foreign policy in the White House? He has not even banned torture, contrary to what his supporters would fervently have us believe. If further evidence were needed, we have the November 28 report in the *Washington Post*: "Two Afghan teenagers held in U.S. detention north of Kabul this year said they were beaten by American guards, photographed naked, deprived of sleep and held in solitary confinement in concrete cells for at least two weeks while undergoing daily interrogation about their alleged links to the Taliban." This is but the

latest example of the continuance of torture under the new administration.

But the shortcomings of Barack Obama and the naiveté of his fans is not the important issue. The important issue is the continuation and escalation of the American war in Afghanistan, based on the myth that the individuals we label "Taliban" are indistinguishable from those who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, whom we usually label "al Qaeda". "I am convinced," the president said in his speech at the United States Military Academy (West Point) on December 1, "that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the epicenter of violent extremism practiced by al Qaeda. It is from here that we were attacked on 9/11, and it is from here that new attacks are being plotted as I speak."

Obama used one form or another of the word "extremist" eleven times in his half-hour talk. Young, impressionable minds must be carefully taught; a future generation of military leaders who will command America's never-ending wars must have no doubts that the bad guys are "extremists", that "extremists" are by definition bad guys, that "extremists" are beyond the pale and do not act from human, rational motivation like we do, that we – quintessential non-extremists, peace-loving moderates – are the good guys, forced into one war

after another against our will. Sending robotic death machines flying over Afghanistan and Pakistan to drop powerful bombs on the top of wedding parties, funerals, and homes is of course not extremist behavior for human beings.

And the bad guys attacked the US “from here”, Afghanistan. That’s why the United States is “there”, Afghanistan. But in fact the 9-11 attack was planned in Germany, Spain and the United States as much as in Afghanistan. It could have been planned in a single small room in Panama City, Taiwan, or Bucharest. What is needed to plot to buy airline tickets and take flying lessons in the United States? And the attack was carried out entirely in the United States. But Barack Obama has to maintain the fiction that Afghanistan was, and is, vital and indispensable to any attack on the United States, past or future. That gives him the right to occupy the country and kill the citizens as he sees fit. Robert Baer, former CIA officer with long involvement in that part of the world has noted: “The people that want their country liberated from the West have nothing to do with Al Qaeda. They simply want us gone because we’re foreigners, and they’re rallying behind the Taliban because the Taliban are experienced, effective fighters.”

The pretenses extend further. US leaders have fed the public a certain image of the insurgents (all labeled together under the name “Taliban”) and of the conflict to cover the true imperialistic motivation behind the war. The predominant image at the headlines/TV news level and beyond is that of the Taliban as an implacable and monolithic “enemy” which must be militarily defeated at all costs for America’s security, with a negotiated settlement or compromise not being an option. However, consider the following which have been reported at various times during the past two years about the actual behavior of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan vis-à-vis the Taliban, which can raise questions about Obama’s latest escalation:

The US military in Afghanistan has long been considering paying Taliban fighters who renounce violence against the government in Kabul, as the United States has done with Iraqi insurgents.

President Obama has floated the idea of negotiating with moderate elements of the Taliban.

US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, said last month that the United States would support any role Saudi Arabia chose to pursue in trying to engage Taliban officials.

Canadian troops are reaching out to the Taliban in various ways.

A top European Union official and a United Nations staff member were ordered by the Kabul government to leave the country after allegations that they had met Taliban insurgents without the administration’s knowledge. And two senior diplomats for the United Nations were expelled from the country, accused by the Afghan government of unauthorized dealings with insurgents. However, the Afghanistan government itself has had a series of secret talks with “moderate Taliban” since 2003 and President Hamid Karzai has called for peace talks with Taliban leader Mohammed Omar.

Organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as the United Nations have become increasingly open about their contacts with the Taliban leadership and other insurgent groups.

Gestures of openness are common practice among some of Washington’s allies in Afghanistan, notably the Dutch, who make negotiating with the Taliban an explicit part of their military policy.

The German government is officially against negotiations, but some members of the governing coalition have suggested Berlin host talks with the Taliban.

MI-6, Britain’s external security service, has held secret talks with the Taliban up to half a dozen times. At the local level, the British cut a deal, appointing a former Taliban leader as a district chief in Helmand

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## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**“I don’t foresee the return of the Taliban. Afghanistan is not in imminent danger of falling. The al-Qaeda presence is very diminished. The maximum estimate is less than 100 operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies”**

province in exchange for security guarantees.

Senior British officers involved with the Afghan mission have confirmed that direct contact with the Taliban has led to insurgents changing sides as well as rivals in the Taliban movement providing intelligence which has led to leaders being killed or captured.

British authorities hold that there are distinct differences between different “tiers” of the Taliban and that it is essential to try to separate the doctrinaire extremists from others who are fighting for money or because they resent the presence of foreign forces in their country.

British contacts with the Taliban have occurred despite British Prime Minister Gordon Brown publicly ruling out such talks; on one occasion he told the House of Commons: “We will not enter into any negotiations with these people.”

For months there have been repeated reports of “good Taliban” forces being airlifted by Western helicopters from one part of Afghanistan to another to protect them from Afghan or Pakistani military forces. At an October 11 news conference in Kabul, President Hamid Karzai himself claimed that “some unidentified helicopters dropped armed men in the northern provinces at night.”

On November 2, *IslamOnline.net* (Qatar) reported: “The emboldened Taliban movement in Afghanistan turned down an American offer of power-sharing in exchange for accepting the presence of foreign troops, Afghan government sources confirmed. ‘US negotiators had offered the Taliban leadership through Mullah Wakil Ahmed Mutawakkil (former Taliban foreign minister) that if they accept the presence of NATO troops in Afghanistan, they would be given the governorship of six provinces in the south and northeast ... America wants eight army and air force bases in different parts of Afghanistan in order to tackle the possible regrouping of [the] Al-Qaeda network,’ a senior Afghan Foreign

Ministry official told *IslamOnline.net*.”

There has been no confirmation of this from American officials, but the *New York Times* on October 28 listed six provinces that were being considered to receive priority protection from the US military, five of which are amongst the eight mentioned in the *IslamOnline* report as being planned for US military bases, although no mention is made in the *Times* of the above-mentioned offer. The next day, *Asia Times* reported: “The United States has withdrawn its troops from its four key bases in Nuristan [or Nooristan], on the border with Pakistan, leaving the northeastern province as a safe haven for the Taliban-led insurgency to orchestrate its regional battles.” Nuristan, where earlier in the month eight US soldiers were killed and three Apache helicopters hit by hostile fire, is one of the six provinces offered to the Taliban as reported in the *IslamOnline.net* story.

The part about al-Qaeda is ambiguous and questionable, not only because the term has long been loosely used as a catch-all for any group or individual in opposition to US foreign policy in this part of the world, but also because the president’s own national security adviser, former Marine Gen. James Jones, stated in early October: “I don’t foresee the return of the Taliban. Afghanistan is not in imminent danger of falling. The al-Qaeda presence is very diminished. The maximum estimate is less than 100 operating in the country, no bases, no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies.”

Shortly after Jones’s remarks, we could read in the *Wall Street Journal*: “Hunted by U.S. drones, beset by money problems and finding it tougher to lure young Arabs to the bleak mountains of Pakistan, al-Qaida is seeing its role shrink there and in Afghanistan, according to intelligence reports and Pakistan and U.S. officials. ... For Arab youths who are al-Qaida’s primary recruits, ‘it’s not romantic to be cold and hungry and hiding,’ said a senior U.S. official in South Asia.”

From all of the above is it not reasonable to conclude that the United States is willing and able to live with the Taliban, as repulsive as their social philosophy is? Perhaps even a Taliban state which would go across the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has been talked about in some quarters. What then is Washington fighting for? What moves the president of the United States to sacrifice so much American blood and treasure? In past years, US leaders have spoken of bringing democracy to Afghanistan, liberating Afghan women, or modernizing a backward country. President Obama made no mention of any of these previous supposed *vital* goals in his December 1 speech. He spoke only of the attacks of September 11, al Qaeda, the Taliban, terrorists, extremists, and such, symbols guaranteed to fire up an American audience. Yet, the president himself declared at one point: "Al Qaeda has not reemerged in Afghanistan in the same numbers as before 9/11, but they retain their safe havens along the border." Ah yes, the terrorist danger ... always, everywhere, forever, particularly when it seems the weakest.

How many of the West Point cadets, how many Americans, give thought to the fact that Afghanistan is surrounded by the immense oil reserves of the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea regions? Or that Afghanistan is ideally situated for oil and gas pipelines to serve much of Europe and south Asia, lines that can deliberately bypass non-allies of the empire, Iran and Russia? If only the Taliban will not attack the lines. "One of our goals is to stabilize Afghanistan, so it can become a conduit and a hub between South and Central Asia so that energy can flow to the south ...", said Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs in 2007.

Afghanistan would also serve as the home of American military bases, the better to watch and pressure next-door Iran and the rest of Eurasia. And NATO ... struggling to find a *raison d'être* since the end of the Cold War. If the alliance is forced to pull

out of Afghanistan without clear accomplishments after eight years will its future be even more in doubt?

So, for the present at least, the American War on Terror in Afghanistan continues and regularly and routinely creates new anti-American terrorists, as it has done in Iraq. This is not in dispute even at the Pentagon or the CIA. God Bless America.

**Although the "surge" failed as policy, it succeeded as propaganda**

They don't always use the word "surge", but that's what they mean. Our admirable leaders and our mainstream media that love to interview them would like us to believe that escalation of the war in Afghanistan is in effect a "surge", like the one in Iraq which, they believe, has proven so successful. But the reality of the surge in Iraq was nothing like its promotional campaign. To the extent that there has been a reduction in violence in Iraq (now down to a level that virtually any other society in the world would find horrible and intolerable, including Iraqi society before the US invasion and occupation), we must keep in mind the following summary of how and why it "succeeded":

\* Thanks to America's lovely little war, there are many millions of Iraqis either dead, wounded, crippled, homebound or otherwise physically limited, internally displaced, in foreign exile, or in bursting American and Iraqi prisons. Many others have been so traumatized that they are concerned simply for their own survival. Thus, a huge number of potential victims and killers has been markedly reduced.

\* Extensive ethnic cleansing has taken place: Sunnis and Shiites are now living much more than before in their own special enclaves, with entire neighborhoods surrounded by high concrete walls and strict security checkpoints; violence of the sectarian type has accordingly gone down.

\* In the face of numerous "improvised explosive devices" on the roads, US soldiers venture out a lot less, so the violence

**Our admirable leaders and our mainstream media that love to interview them would like us to believe that escalation of the war in Afghanistan is in effect a "surge", like the one in Iraq which, they believe, has proven so successful**

**We should never forget that Iraqi society has been destroyed. The people of that unhappy land have lost everything – their homes, their schools, their neighborhoods, their mosques, their jobs, their careers, their professionals, their health care, their legal system, their women’s rights, their religious tolerance, their security, their friends, their families, their past, their present, their future, their lives. But they do have their surge**

against them has been sharply down. It should be kept in mind that insurgent attacks on American forces following the invasion of 2003 is how the Iraqi violence all began in the first place.

\* For a long period, the US military was paying insurgents (or “former insurgents”) to not attack occupation forces.

\* The powerful Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr declared a unilateral cease-fire for his militia, including attacks against US troops, that was in effect for an extended period; this was totally unconnected to the surge.

We should never forget that Iraqi society has been destroyed. The people of that unhappy land have lost everything – their homes, their schools, their neighborhoods, their mosques, their jobs, their careers, their professionals, their health care, their legal system, their women’s rights, their religious tolerance, their security, their friends, their families, their past, their present, their future, their lives. But they do have their surge.

### **The War against Everything and Everyone, Endlessly**

Nidal Malik Hasan, the US Army psychiatrist who killed 13 and wounded some 30 at Fort Hood, Texas in November reportedly regards the US War on Terror as a war aimed at Muslims. He told colleagues that “the US was battling not against security threats in Iraq and Afghanistan, but Islam itself.”<sup>10</sup> Hasan had long been in close contact with Anwar al-Awlaki, a US-born cleric and al Qaeda sympathizer now living in Yemen, who also called the US War on Terror a “war against Muslims”. Many,

probably most, Muslims all over the world hold a similar view about American foreign policy.

I believe they’re mistaken. For many years, going back to at least the Korean war, it’s been fairly common for accusations to be made by activists opposed to US policies, in the United States and abroad, as well as by Muslims, that the United States chooses as its bombing targets only people of color, those of the Third World, or Muslims. But it must be remembered that in 1999 one of the most sustained and ferocious American bombing campaigns ever – 78 days in a row – was carried out against the Serbs of the former Yugoslavia: white, European, Christians.

Indeed, we were told that the bombing was to rescue the people of Kosovo, who are largely Muslim. Earlier, the United States had come to the aid of the Muslims of Bosnia in their struggle against the Serbs. The United States is in fact an equal-opportunity bomber. The only qualifications for a country to become an American bombing target appear to be: (a) It poses a sufficient obstacle – real, imagined, or, as with Serbia, ideological – to the desires of the empire; (b) It is virtually defenseless against aerial attack. **CT**

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

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