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ISSUE 78

“Madness alone is truly terrifying, inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion or bribes.” – Joseph Conrad, The Secret Agent

Coming to a Shopping Mall Near You?

Trevor Grundy examines the causes, and likely effects, of the terror attack at Nairobi's Westgate Shopping Mall



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Coming to a shopping mall near you?

Trevor Grundy examines the cause, and likely effects, of last month's terror attacks at Nairobi's Westgate Shopping Mall

'Madness alone is truly terrifying, insomuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion or bribes.' – First Secretary Vladimir to the agent provocateur Adolf Verloc in Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel, *The Secret Agent*

Vladimir, the first-secretary of an unnamed (but probably Russian) embassy in London in Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* was a man who knew a thing or two about 19th century anarchists.

So it's a pity that a modern day equivalent of this smooth talking representative of an autocratic foreign power who had diplomatic immunity to cover his violent plans wasn't in Nairobi in September to plop a few pearls of wisdom into the blocked ears of Kenya's policemen and government officials about 21st century terrorists after security officers and intelligence chiefs had so disastrously ignored warnings made months ago by al-Shabaab – the Somalia-based Islamists – that an attack on the Israel-owned Westgate Shopping Mall was on the cards.

Security officials in Israel long ago warned the Kenyan Government that Nairobi's Westgate Mall was a prime target for a terrorist attack.

Several cafes and restaurants in the complex are Israel-owned, including the ground floor Artcafe. Unconfirmed reports say that

someone, possibly a white European woman, rented an office block in the mall and that men and women were seen carrying goods (maybe guns, ammunition, protective clothing and telephones) into the area for safekeeping over several weeks before the September 22 assault.

Then it came and, after a four day siege, 67 lay dead and an unknown number more were under the rubble caused by the collapse of part of the complex. As many as 200 were injured after 18 heavily armed men entered the mall from at least three entrances, hurling grenades and shooting people – including children – at close range. The Kenya Red Cross said that at least 59 people were still missing after three floors at the back of the building collapsed on top of the supermarket.

"It's our 9/11," said one of the Kenyan lawyers defending President Uhuru Kenyatta and Vice President William Ruto, who are facing charges at International Criminal Court at The Hague of masterminding the slaughters of over 1,000 of their own people after the 2007 general election.

As many as 600,000 people were displaced after an explosion of ethnic violence in the East African country lauded as "the mirror of democracy in Africa" by departing British officials after independence in 1963.

Back to Conrad.

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“The sacrosanct fetish of today is science,” Verloc was told by Vladamir, who went on to instruct his wayward, overweight mercenary agent to blow up the Royal Observatory at Greenwich in order to shock Britain’s middle classes. For, at the end of the 19th century in Britain and most other parts of the Western world, science was the quasi-religious belief symbol for never ending prosperity and material progress. It was the age’s sacrosanct fetish.

An attack on the London Observatory, the first meridian, said the gloating, scheming, Vladamir, would be “an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable” and would be terrifyingly effective for those very reasons.

“Go for the first meridian. You don’t know the middle classes as well as I do. Their sensibilities are jaded. The first meridian. Nothing better and nothing easier, I should think.”

His prediction was that the comforting symbols of middle class prosperity and “the absurd ferocity of such a demonstration will affect them (the middle classes) more profoundly than the mangling of a whole street – or theatre full of their own kind. To the last one they can always say: ‘Oh! it’s mere class hate.’ But what is one to say of an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad? Madness alone is truly terrifying, inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion or bribes.”

Vladamir’s aim was to so anger the middle class that they’d put pressure on their government to round up, imprison or expel foreign anarchists who at the end of the 19th century were using London to recruit supporters by spreading ideas of liberalism and freedom in Russia.

“England lags,” Vladamir tells Verloc. “This country is absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty.”

In an essay published in 2009, the phi-

losopher John Grey said that at the beginning of the 21st century science lives on as a ‘sacrosanct fetish’ and that the middle class believe that the Internet is the source of all their prosperity, “linking up economic life everywhere in a network of beneficial exchange. Yet, at the same time, in a development that attests to the power of Conrad’s darkly ironic vision, the symbols of trade and technology have come under terrorist attack. On 11 September 2001, the suicide warriors of al-Qaeda carried off a terrifying assault on the spirit of the age of precisely the kind that Mr Vladamir recommended.”

Twelve years later, there are new and very different suicide warriors around.

Several men dressed in expensive Western suits, their faces covered with scarves entered through the side door of an Israeli-owned café, the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi where they set about killing people and destroying one of the most sacrosanct fetishes of the new globalised multi-cultural, multi-racial and now multi-sexual middle class – the supermarket.

At the end of September, Kenya’s politicians admitted to a massive intelligence failure.

They knew an attack would come – al-Shabaab’s revenge for Kenya’s military intervention along with African Union (AU) peacekeepers in Somalia where they once reigned supreme – but they didn’t bother to put guards around Westgate Shopping Mall, an obvious soft target.

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9/11 Twin Towers, New York.

9/22, Westgate Shopping Mall, Nairobi

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad tells us: “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz,” the ivory trader of the Inner Station, who was corrupt, power-obsessed and hardly sane.

All Europe (plus Israel and South Africa) contributed to the trading centre at the heart of Nairobi when it was attacked on September 22, besieged for four days, fol-

lowed by three days of national mourning during which time President Kenyatta (son of the country's first president, Jomo) went from zero to hero overnight in the eyes of the local and international media.

Far from being weakened by the shopping mall fiasco, he has emerged stronger than ever, even after accusations that he and his VP rallied ethnic militias in 2007 to rape and murder rivals after a hotly contested election.

"Yet," said a report by Jerome Starkey in London's *Times* newspaper on September 26, "after the worst attack on Kenyan soil for a generation, he is emerging as a national hero" – thanks to his oratory calling on Kenyans to 'act as one' in the face of the latest outrage."

Said Kenyatta, eyes up, fist pounding the podium, "We shall rise as one, defend and build this nation together, I feel the pain of every life we have lost and share your grief at the nation's loss."

The International Criminal Court (ICC) temporarily adjourned the trial of William Ruto so he could help co-ordinate a response to the Kenyan crisis. It now seems unlikely that either men will stand trial at The Hague.

"The attack," said Starkey, "in one of the most stable and prosperous countries in East Africa is a reminder of how much the West needs Kenya. Mr Kenyatta's soldiers are in the front line against extremists in Somalia. His security services share intelligence with Britain and America. With terrorism their common enemy, Kenya and the West will be friends again."

Friends with Israel, too, though Catherine Philp, Middle East correspondent for the *Times* warns that by actively deploying Israeli commandos on Kenyan soil raises the risk of inflaming further Islamism anger, which would make Kenya a ripe target

for terrorist attack.

"Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea are three countries which are crucial for Israel because they act as a buffer zone in a region which is seeing Islamic fundamentalism growing at a rapid pace," Galia Sabar, head of African Studies at Tel Aviv University said in an interview with AFP on Sept 24. As part of the Horn of Africa, both Ethiopia and Eritrea have access to the Red Sea, which is strategically and economically important to the Jewish state.

Kenya has enjoyed a fruitful relationship with Israel since the two countries established formal ties 50 years ago. Since Kenyan independence in 1963, Israel has had a very close relationship with this country in sectors as diverse as agriculture, education, security, military and intelligence. And the two countries' co-operation on security matters goes back decades.

The peak of co-operation between Israel and Kenya was during Operation Entebbe in 1976 when Israeli commandos flew to Entebbe, in Uganda, to free passengers aboard an Air France jet hijacked by Palestinian militants. At the time, a Kenyan official persuaded Nairobi to allow agents from Israel's Mossad spy set-up to collect information ahead of the rescue bid and later paved the way for Israeli air force planes to refuel at Nairobi airport in the wake of the raid.

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Book after book and film after film are written about the appalling “Happy Valley” set of British twits who settled in Kenya after the Second World War and whose life style helped spark off a mass uprising of the landless – the Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s
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Twenty years later, co-operation deepened after Al-Qaeda’s August 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania set off a warning light for Israeli intelligence regarding the terror threat in Africa. 212 people were killed and 4,000 were injured in Nairobi, while 11 people were killed and 85 injured in Dar es Salaam. The attacks were aimed at US facilities but local men, women and children suffered the most.

Reports say Israeli forces were directly involved in Kenyan efforts to end the deadly siege on the Westgate Mall. Israel has not admitted it sent troops to Nairobi but it seems certain that Mossad and Shin Bet (the internal security service) helped the Kenyan government manage this crisis and prepare for the next blow which al-Shabaab says will land soon.

British security expert Peter Taylor says the aim of al-Shabbab is to turn Kenya and then the rest of East Africa into one vast Islamist “state.” Muslims make up around 11 percent of Kenya’s 40 million population and are particularly numerous –and militant –along the Swahili Coast stretching from southern Somalia to southern Tanzania.

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The Westgate Shopping Mall speaks to a bubble of privilege

Owned by Israeli businesspeople, Westgate was the favourite shopping centre for many of the 30,000 British expatriates, ranging from descendants of wealthy white settlers of the last century to the recent wave of highly paid diplomats, business people, aid workers and journalists who have made this comfortable hub of turbulent Africa their home, or base for a while.

Westgate, say Duncan Gardham and Catherine Philp of the *Times* “speaks to the bubble of privilege in which most of the city’s British population still dwell happily.”

Along with rich Asians, wealthy Africans from the Kikuyu (Kenya’s largest and most powerful tribe) mix with tourists from all over the world who fly in to see wild animals

which are being wiped out at an alarming rate in other parts of the African continent.

Gardham and Philp paint a picture worth looking at to understand why Westgate was chosen as a target for terrorists.

They say, “The British community in Kenya today remains divided between the settlers’ descendants, who regard themselves as true white Africans, British by ethnicity only and expatriate Britons who have made their home in Kenya for business opportunities. Many black Kenyans fail to spot the difference. Both groups lead privileged lives with tennis courts, maids and swimming pools, that only a handful of wealthy blacks can aspire to. Racial tensions between the communities exist. The climate, the astonishing beauty of resorts such as Lamu and the fact that Kenya is widely seen as the Eastern and central African hub for finance and telecoms is a draw for professional British expats. Barclays is one of the biggest banks in Kenya but Google, Coca Cola, Nestle, MasterCard, Standard Chartered and Microsoft also have big operations in the country.

“The glamour of Kenya is endorsed regularly by a global celebrity set who either visit the country’s beaches and game reserves or build tourist businesses there. Flavio Briatore, the former Formula One tycoon, owns the Lion and Sea retreat while Princess Caroline of Monaco and Prince Ernst of Hanover have homes on Lamu Island. There is widespread outrage at the acquittal of Thomas Cholmondeley, the scion of one of Kenya’s most famous white settler families, on charges that he murdered a black poacher in 2006. He served eight months for manslaughter. A year earlier, he had shot dead a black game ranger but no charges were brought. The case focused attention on what critics say is a judicial system still stacked in favour of whites.”

The third in line to the throne, Prince William and his wife Kate visit Kenya and protect its animals by heading up various charities. Prince Harry is also a regular visitor.

Books and films have been written and produced detailing the appalling “Happy Valley” set of British twits who settled in Kenya after the Second World War and whose lifestyle helped spark off a mass uprising of the landless – the Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s.

Journalists are based in Nairobi because it’s well connected, the life-style is superb and (until now) it was safe. Many of them write about what’s happening in Lagos (Nigeria) and Cape Town (South Africa) from their hotels rooms and luxury homes in Nairobi and Mombasa. Nairobi has become the communication centre for the international media.

But in the reports about the Westgate siege the people who make up the largest sector of the Kenyan population were hardly mentioned – the urban poor who see but never enter places like the Westgate Shopping Mall. Africa’s swarming and impoverished millions don’t visit such places in neighbouring states, either – Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda, South Africa, all of them bursting with luxury goods in supermarkets as good as anything you’ll find in Toronto, New York, London, Paris or Berlin. All you need is foreign exchange. Lots of it.

Long ago when I lived and worked in Africa, a Jesuit priest told me on a plane journey between Lisbon to Nairobi that one day the poor of East Africa would rise up along the Swahili Coast from Somalia to southern Tanzania – with horrendous consequences for the indifferent rich.

“Kenya has become a place for the very rich where the very poor are never seen. They are people from the underground. We rarely see their faces and when we do hear their voices, so few of us grasp what they’re saying. One day you will be rich, too, they’re told by the politicians. One day they will go home and sharpen their pangas and go looking for the men who tell them such lies.”

By 2050, a predicted 75 percent of the world’s population will be urbanites – that’s an additional three billion people – accord-

ing to a new book, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, by David Kilcullens (Hurst, London). He says four great changes are shaping the coming decades:

- Massive population growth that will peak towards the end of the 21st century
- Rapid urbanization
- A crowding to the world’s coastlines
- Revolution in technology-driven connectivity.

The author says: “More and more of the world’s population is in the cities. Eighty percent of the world’s cities are coastal. The rural poor of the world are flocking to the cities.”

Copycat violence or other terrorist attacks

As Kenyan forces, aided by their friends from America, Britain and Israel, struggled to take control of the Westgate Mall, US shopping centre Western companies took stock of the overall situation in East Africa and issued a warning.

Malachy Kavanagh, a spokesperson for the International Council of Shopping Centers, an American-based trade group of mall and shopping centre owners, said many supermarkets would soon be drastic increasing security measures. Officials may increase a police presence at shopping complexes by enlisting off-duty officers to stand guard and defend against men entering in western suits with guns in their pockets. He said that mall proprietors will be careful to take their cues from consumers, who may already be weary from boosted security at airports. And for mall owners and security specialists, the carnage in Kenya is just the last evidence of shopping centres; vulnerability to terror attacks.

Kavanagh says, “Since 9/11, the industry has taken a very different view of terror and the potential for it. He said that the industry has spent millions on security training initiatives at the more than 1,500 enclosed

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The last big terror attack on a British shopping centre was in 1996 when an IRA bomb wrecked the Arndale Centre in Manchester, injuring more than 200 people and causing an estimated £700 million damage
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malls in the US since the attack on the twin towers in New York,” adding, “The big fear for many mall proprietors is the possibility of a ‘copycat attack’ in the wake of the siege of the Westgate Shopping Mall by militants from al-Shabaab. The group has said the assault was retribution for a 2011 push by Kenya into Somalia.”

In an interview with NBC News, New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly said a mall is what security experts call a ‘soft’ target, “because you have no external checks to security.” And Juan Zarate, a former White House counter-terrorism adviser told Reuters that official worry revolves around the possibility that other terror groups will replicate this kind of assault.

The British Council for Shopping Centres said that it would be seeking guidance from Scotland Yard’s Counter-Terrorism Command on the threat and on any safety measures retailers might take to protect themselves –and their customers–in days to come. The last big terror attack on a British shopping centre was in 1996 when an IRA bomb wrecked the Arndale Centre in Manchester, injuring more than 200 people and causing an estimated £700 million damage.

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The hunt for the White Widow . . . and search for oil profits in Somalia

Because it was a British colony, coverage of the siege at Westgate was massive in that country. It dominated the front pages of most newspapers and led television and radio news programmes for over a week, with most of the media zooming in on Interpol’s decision to make a Red Notice Alert (an International Wanted Persons Alert –IWPA) on 29- year old Samantha Lewthwaite, dubbed the “White Widow.”

Interpol sent out her fingerprints, photographs and details of false identities used by her to 190 countries. Lewthwaite, a mother of three from Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire in southern England is suspected of being one of the organizers of the Westgate attack

and the bomb cell’s financier and logistical supplier. She met Jermaine Lindsay, a Jamaican convert to Islam (as she was) whose suicide bomb killed 26 people on the London Underground on July 7, 2005, through an Islamic chat room. In all, 54 people were killed and over 700 injured on 7/7. Lewthwaite was questioned by the police. She appeared shocked and gave an interview condemning extremists who had “poisoned her husband’s mind. Soon, she dropped off the intelligence radar but later travelled around Kenya and Somalia on a false passport and is now on the top of Interpol’s most wanted persons list.

Britain’s anti-terrorist officers are still kicking themselves. So are the Kenyans whose leaders have admitted to gross incompetence during the siege. Reports say that when the Army took over at Westgate on the night of Sept 22 they were so disorganized they started shooting their own police officers. Tristan McConnell wrote the next day in the *Times*, “Multiple witnesses have described some of the attackers as being ethnic Somalis but others are said to be black Africans. Kenya has its own domestic radical groups, which preach jihad and are aligned with al-Qaeda’s ideology. Foremost among these is al-Jirja, formerly known as the Muslim Youth Centre which actively seeks recruits in Kenya and is believed to have recruited hundreds of Kenya Muslims to join al-Shabaab since 2008. It, too, has issued threats against Kenya and its leaders have been subjected to UN sanctions. Analysts are not ruling out the possibility that the Westgate Mall assault was planned and organized by Kenyan radicals in Kenya.”

How closely al-Shabaab is linked to dissidents within Kenya itself is not known but it undoubtedly suits the Kenyatta/Ruto led government to give the outside world (and investors) the impression that the attack was caused by foreigners. And if a white woman from Aylesbury was really the mastermind, then so much the better for a President on trial at the Hague now pulling his

countrymen together “as one” like a true statesman in the face of an onslaught organized by foreigners and not his own poverty stricken people in one of the world’s most corrupt countries.

Whether the so called International Community will respond to Kenya’s request for greater financial and military help to wipe out al-Shabaab in Somalia (a country with enormous potential oil wealth) remains to be seen. Meantime, the hunt for 70 missing people continues in the rubble of Westgate and questions are being asked in Britain and Washington about whether the Kenyan government should be allowed to tackle well organized terrorists on their own or if President Kenyatta will need a little help from his friends – including Israel and Mossad.

An unexpected result of the Westgate assault could be a further suppression of liberty inside Kenya, a police hunt for local as well as foreign dissidents and a British/America/Israeli military – drone onslaught against al-Shabaab inside Somalia.

An editorial in the *Times* on Sept 23, headlined Africa’s Terrorist Threat: “Western policy towards the region (the Horn of Africa) has for 20 years been shaped by the memory of a disastrous US intervention in Somalia, when 18 US servicemen were killed in Mogadishu. US administrators have since preferred to rely on proxy forces in Somalia and drone strikes. There is nothing wrong with those methods but they need to be pursued with greater force. Though the military strength of the African Union’s mission in Somalia operating under a UN mandate was increased last year to more than 17,000, it needs reinforcement. Any perception that its forces are overstretched will encourage further depredations by Islamist militants. The struggle of Africans to overcome the forces of nihilism is not their alone.”

The two decade long civil war devastated Somalia’s formal economy and state institutions. In their place, local and diaspora private companies ran everything from water supply, clinics, schools, mobile phone com-

panies to banks. Against the background of the possibility of harder, more frightful military strikes against al-Shabbah, just how President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud’s government in Mogadishu will react and negotiate with major new investors remains to be seen.

A United Nations panel of experts warned in July that competition for Somalia’s oil could spark clan fighting and empower corrupt warlords who caused the disintegration of the country 22 years ago. A report in *Private Eye*, the British satirical magazine, said that Britain had positioned itself to play a key role in “stabilising” Somalia as a London-led feeding frenzy for oil proceeds.

When Conrad’s Vladamir instructed Verloc to see that the London Observatory was blown up to scare the daylights out of the English middle class, the goal of the exercise was to put such pressure on the government that the police rounded up every anarchist in town – thus safeguarding the interests of the tsar’s Russia.

It’s possible that the aftermath of the Westgate Shopping Mall attack could benefit not only President Kenyatta and his VP but that it could also persuade the “international community” (including Israel) to step up the war against al-Shabaab inside Somalia, something that, if successful, would undoubtedly benefit those engaged, in the words of *Private Eye*, “on a feeding frenzy for oil proceeds.”

Meantime, go carefully into your shopping mall. Vladamir’s words about terrorist tactics and the fate of ordinary men, women and children remain as chilling as ever . . .

“Go for the first meridian. You don’t know the middle classes as I do. Their sensibilities are jaded. The first meridian. Nothing better and nothing easier, I should think.” **CT**

Trevor Grundy is a British journalist and author who lived and worked in central, eastern and southern Africa from 1966-1996. He lives in southern England and works as an author, researcher and journalist

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Blurred vision

Michael Parenti on the confused legacy of Martin Luther King Jr

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The crowd exploded with thunderous applause and wild cheers. Many of us were left overwhelmed and misty eyed
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The 50th anniversary of the March on Washington – in which Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. made his famed “I Have a Dream” speech – has recently won renewed attention from various print and electronic media in the United States. But the more attention given to King’s extraordinary speech, the less we seem to know about King himself, the less aware we are about the serious challenges he was presenting, challenges that remain urgent and ignored to this very day.

The March on Washington took place on August 28, 1963. Despite repeated fear mongering by certain commentators and public officials who predicted there would be violence in the streets – over 250,000 people descended upon Washington D.C. in a massive show of unity and peaceful determination.

I was there. About two-thirds of the demonstrators were African-American, and about one-third were white. After all these years I still recall how gripped I was by the vast sweep of the crowd moving like democracy’s infantry across the nation’s capital, determined to awaken “our leaders” in Congress and the White House. The high moment of the day was Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. It was a call to freedom and enfranchisement for a people who had endured centuries of slavery followed by segregation and lynch-mob rule. In his speech King reminded us that “the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an ex-

ile in his own land.” He went on: “The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.”

King continued to stoke the new militancy: “We can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. . . . Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.”

Then came his smashing conclusion: “When we allow freedom to ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children,” all colors and creeds “will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’”

At this, the crowd exploded with thunderous applause and wild cheers. Many of us were left overwhelmed and misty eyed. For all its clichés and overdone metaphors, King’s “I Have a Dream” speech remains a truly great oration.

So impressive is the speech, however, that commentators and pundits to this day have found it easy to focus safely upon it to the neglect of other vital social issues that engaged

King. The opinion-makers prefer to treat Martin Luther King as an inspirational icon rather than a radical leader. He has been domesticated and sanitized. Today the real King probably would not be invited to the White House because he is too far left, too much the agitator.

In 1967, he was becoming an increasingly serious problem for the defenders of privilege and profit. King came out against the Vietnam War that year, a fact that is seldom mentioned today. His stance discomforted many liberals (black and white) who felt they should concentrate on civil rights and not alienate potential supporters with anti-war issues. But for King, the US government had become “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world,” spending far more on death and destruction than on vital social programs.

He differed with those who believed we could resist violence and cruelty at home while resorting to violence and cruelty abroad. He condemned “those who make peaceful revolution impossible,” those who “refuse to give up the privileges and pleasures that come from the immense profits from overseas investments . . . the individual capitalists who extract wealth” at the expense of other peoples and places.

By 1967 King was treading on dangerous ground. He was connecting the issues. He condemned “the triple evils of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism.” The interests that brought us slums also brought us wars, he argued, and they were getting richer for the doing.

By 1968, the year he was assassinated, King was also waging war against poverty. Civil rights, he dared to say, were linked to economic rights. He was planning a national occupation of Washington DC, called the Poor People’s Campaign. Again he was treading on dangerous ground bringing together working-class people of various ethnic groups.

These class demands go unmentioned in the usual MLK commemorations. The “I Have a Dream” oration now overshadows the other less known messages that King was putting forth not long before he was killed, including the search for economic justice for all working people. The great “dream speech” of 1963

serves less as an inspiration and more as a cloak covering his latter-day radical views regarding class struggle and anti-imperialism.

In 1968, at the age of 39, Martin Luther King was killed by a sniper’s bullet while standing on the balcony of his motel room in Memphis, Tennessee. He was in Memphis to lend support to a sanitation workers strike, the very kind of thing his opponents were finding increasingly intolerable. A penniless fugitive from the Missouri State Penitentiary, James Earl Ray, while being sought by the police, supposedly took it upon himself singlehandedly to make his way to Memphis where he somehow located King’s motel balcony and shot him from a room across the courtyard.

Then entirely on his own, supposedly with no visible financial support, the fugitive convict and newly established assassin made his way to England. Arrested in London at Heathrow Airport with substantial sums of cash in his pocket, Ray was extradited to the United States and charged with the crime. He was strongly advised by his lawyer to enter a guilty plea (to avoid the death penalty) and was sentenced to 99 years. Three days later he recanted his confession. Over the ensuing decades he made repeatedly unsuccessful efforts to withdraw his guilty plea and be tried by a jury. Ray died in prison in 1998, still proclaiming his innocence.

In 1986 King’s birthday was established as a national holiday. Hundreds of streets in America have been renamed in his honor. There are annual commemorations. His resonant voice, memorable words and gripping cadence are replayed. But the politico-economic issues he highlighted continue to be passed over by mainstream leaders and commentators.

In addition, the opinion-makers who celebrate King’s birthday every year and hail him as a monumental figure have nothing to say about the many unresolved questions related to his assassination. No one openly entertains the question of whether there were powerful people (certainly more powerful than James Earl Ray) who thought it necessary to do away with this popular leader because he had moved too far beyond “I Have a Dream.” **CT**

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The opinion-makers who celebrate King’s birthday every year and hail him as a monumental figure have nothing to say about the many unresolved questions related to his assassination

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Michael Parenti is an award winning, internationally known author. His two most recent books are “The Face of Imperialism” (2011), and “Waiting for Yesterday: Pages from a Street Kid’s Life” (2013), a memoir of his early life

Operation Massacre

In his introduction to Rodolfo Walsh's book *Operation Massacre*, Michael Greenberg finds a man who was murdered for telling the truth

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In 1972 Perón had struck a deal to return, assume the presidency, and save the country from a leftist guerrilla movement that had been operating in his name
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I was nineteen when I arrived in Argentina in the fall of 1972. I had been drawn to South America by the literary explosion that began in the 1950s and was still going on – a historical burst of creativity exemplified by Julio Cortázar, García Márquez, Borges, Ernesto Sábato and other equally potent, unclassifiable writers who were, collectively, in the process of changing the tenor of world literature.

Upon arriving, however, what immediately captured my attention wasn't literature but the political upheavals of the continent with their alarming urgency of living, present time. In those vintage Cold War years, the political fate of South America – the “mood” in the Latino forests and highlands and streets – was as pressing to US foreign policy as that of the Muslim world is today. Fidel Castro was ten years into his reign over Cuba and at the height of his influence. Salvador Allende, a cultivated, European-style Socialist, was the democratically elected

president of Chile. And set to return to Argentina was Juan Domingo Perón, an aging populist with a bewildering, fascist-inflected philosophy who was beloved by Argentina's working class.

Perón had been deposed by a violent military coup in 1955. He had been in exile – first in Panama, then in Spain – for eighteen years. During that time, his Peronist party was outlawed, despite or perhaps because of the fact that it would have won any open election by a landslide. After the 1955 coup, the mere utterance of Perón's name was prohibited and punishable by law.

But in 1972, after a seemingly unending succession of inept military and civilian governments, Perón had struck a deal to return, assume the presidency, and save the country from a leftist guerrilla movement that had been operating in his name.

I hadn't been in Buenos Aires long before I became familiar with the name Rodolfo Walsh. A writer and intellectual hero of the left, Walsh was known to anyone with even a glancing interest in the political scene. In a country of



OPERATION MASSACRE
Rodolpho Walsh
(Seven Stories Press)
\$16.95

adventurers, avant gardists, gangs, demagogues, and sloganeers from every point on the political spectrum, he was a rare voice of integrity – a staunch, clear-eyed realist, more swayed by concrete events than abstract political strategies and ideas. With his strong moral compass, his horse sense, and independent investigative rigor, Walsh was, in the benighted land of Argentina of the 1970s, a cross between Orwell and Woodward and Bernstein.

Operation Massacre is Walsh's most famous work – a precise, meticulously researched account of the execution, on June 9, 1956, of five men suspected of participating in a failed coup against the military government designed to return Perón to power. No major Argentine news outlet would touch the story, and Walsh's exposé was published in a small journal between May 27 and July 29, 1957, and then as a book later that year.

Walsh was thirty when he wrote *Operation Massacre*. In spite of the virtual media blackout it faced, the book would launch his career as a public intellectual and political journalist. (In 1960, he would become one of the founders of the Latin American wire service Prensa Latina.) It is a classic case of a writer who, presented with a subject of pressing injustice, puts aside his other literary ambitions. The story of the “secret executions” of June 1956 came to Walsh by chance. At the time, by his own account, he was an avid reader of fantasy literature, a writer of detective stories, an aspiring “serious” novelist, and, last of all, a journalist. He welcomed the 1955 coup that overthrew Perón; Walsh had been put off by Perón's zealous persecution of lawful dissenters and his admiration for Mussolini, after whose government Perón had modeled his own, right down to the establishment of a loyal band of privileged workers who acted as his street enforcers and unofficial thugs. By the same token, as a man of the left Walsh could not support the equally repressive stupidities of the military government that replaced Perón. This relative impartiality lent a moral authority

to *Operation Massacre* that a more partisan report could not have possessed.

The irrefutable nature of Walsh's investigation is one of the reasons for the book's enduring power. In a country where state atrocities were routinely buried, where silence was a civic means of survival, where innocent citizens could be kidnapped and executed without leaving a trace and even their families kept in the dark – in this country *Operation Massacre* was a work of enormous importance. The book was, and remains, a warning and prophecy of what was to come, a cry to a judicial system that, with few exceptions, allowed and even encouraged the state's security forces to act with impunity.

Most important, it is a document that fully examines the events, the people, the mechanism of the murders, while identifying and holding accountable everyone involved. *Operation Massacre* is a true crime story, designed not to titillate or exploit but to instruct, to reveal and enlighten. It is built upon that rarest element of Argentine life at the time: facts. Facts were a form of sedition with their icy power that nothing – not opinion, passion, or rumor – could equal. Uttering, much less publishing, the facts in those days could be punishable by death.

And the facts are astonishing. On June 9, 1956, the evening of the failed coup attempt, twelve working-class men gather at a mutual friend's house to watch a prize fight, have a few drinks, and play cards. Under orders from military personnel, the police storm the gathering, transport the twelve men to a half frozen suburban field, shoot them, and depart. Due to the hurried, careless discharge of the crime, some of the men remain alive, either wounded or lying motionless and unharmed in the field, left for dead.

As with all investigations of this scale, the story reveals itself to Walsh in phases, through interviews with survivors, lawyers, prosecutors, police, and military participants. There are moments when *Operation Massacre* reads like a forensic mystery; and Walsh's talents as a detective novelist inform

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the story as it unravels, in increments, with its complicated timeline that is so crucial to determining what actually happened.

At one point, Walsh is forced to become part of the story himself, confirming the death of a victim to his parents who had been clinging to the hope that their son was still alive. In another instance, that illustrates to perfection the bizarre and perverse ethos that ruled the land, the police claim that one of their victims' "exhibited injuries" – by which they mean the gunshot wound to the face that they have inflicted on him – are "evidence of his active participation in the revolutionary movement." Another victim, after being left for dead, is arrested while wandering the streets and thrown into solitary confinement without medical attention. He only survives because the regular prisoners throw scraps of bread through the peep hole of his cell.

Yet, as atrocities in Argentina would go – and it is a mean and hellish game to compare them – the massacre of June 9, 1956, was "modest." It is, Walsh knows, the specifics, the particulars, the concrete evidence surrounding a crime that give it meaning, by the simple act of proving that it happened at all. It not only attests to and dignifies the individual suffering that has occurred, it also holds individuals responsible for that suffering. And this exposure, this threat of future justice, may be the only effective deterrent, the only point of restraint on those charged with carrying out the orders of state terror.

Prosecutions often occur decades after the crimes. They don't bring back the dead or change history. But they do affect the future. They lift the cloud of rage and unresolvedness that can hang over the psyche of a country for as long as the perpetrators run free.

They force the state, and the general population, to acknowledge the ordeal of their compatriots. They air the truth and relieve an immeasurable weight of psychological repression. Crucially, they vindicate the loved ones of the disappeared who have been con-

signed to a state of silence and shame.

Socially speaking, victims are rarely regarded as heroes, no matter their courage. More often they become pariahs, unwelcome reminders of the public's collective guilt. Writing *Operation Massacre*, Walsh took the precaution of acquiring signed statements from survivors and witnesses. In doing so he has shown future generations of Argentines that, in the face of iron-clad facts, a form of justice and restitution is possible. The facts, put down by a brave committed writer, ensure that there will be no immunity for those responsible for state-sponsored terror.

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On June 20, 1973, seven months after I arrived in Argentina, Perón, who in absentia had assumed the proportions of a mythical, magical god, returned to the country. He was almost seventy now, still tall and erect, though his blooming reddened face showed the cost of the debaucheries of his well-heeled exile. Within minutes of Perón's landing at Ezeiza Airport in Buenos Aires, where three and a half million Argentines had swarmed to greet him, right-wing Peronists opened machine gun fire on the crowd, targeting members of the Montoneros, the militant left-wing Peronist group whose members and legions of sympathizers were there, en masse, to celebrate what appeared to be an unequivocal victory.

Nearly two hundred people were killed. Many more were injured in the stampede that followed the shooting. And with that, the alliance of enemies that had brought Perón back to Argentina shattered, as it was always destined to do. The Montoneros, whose guerrilla style agitations had done much to pave the way for Perón's return, would soon go back underground, even with Perón in power. A flood of betrayals, kidnappings and drive-by assassinations from both sides followed, and the first stage of what the world would come to know as La Guerra Sucia – the Dirty War – began.

Operation Massacre had been a galvanizing text for the Montoneros during the dictatorships prior to Perón's return and, despite his strong misgivings about Peronism, Walsh would eventually join the group in the 1970s as a kind of elder, intellectual mentor and guide. As the terror escalated, Walsh came to believe that the Montoneros were the only representatives of the left with sufficient organizational skill and popular support to challenge the dictatorship. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Montoneros had successfully tapped into the profoundly romantic nostalgia that working class and poor Argentines felt for Perón. Their strategy was to cast Perón's vague and elusive political pronouncements in a revolutionary light, and by doing so ideologically to nudge his supporters to the left. Employing the caudillo's own words, they couldn't be accused of disloyalty or distortion. The implication was that "true" Peronism belonged to the left.

Walsh urged the Montoneros to aspire to the establishment of a democratic government, with a stable judicial system, a functioning congress, freedom of the press, and open dependable elections. Of paramount importance to Walsh was the creation of a strong legal code consisting of humane, enforceable laws that punished political crimes and guaranteed the continuance of democracy. He disagreed with the Montonero leadership when they burrowed inexorably underground, becoming increasingly avant-gardist, clandestine and cut off from the general population. By 1974, vicious street brawls between Montonero fighters and government forces were a constant feature of urban life. The explosion of bombs and gunshots throughout the night were normal. My own companion (and future wife) was arrested and almost killed after stumbling upon a surprise Montonero demonstration near the Congressional Plaza. For tactical purposes, the Montoneros encouraged the government crackdown, believing that less militant sympathizers, having nowhere to

turn and absorbing much of the brunt of the terror, would join them as fighters underground. This was not what happened. An airless blanket of paranoia and fear gripped the country, and the population, for the most part, withdrew, aiming simply to stay out of the way and survive.

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Walsh wrote his second most famous text on March 24, 1977. "Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta," it is called. The occasion for this letter was the first anniversary of the military junta that had overthrown Isabel Perón's government (Perón died in July 1974 while in office and his wife, Isabel, vice president at the time, assumed the top office). Fittingly, the letter is included in this book. Sharpened by Walsh's lucidly ethical prose, it is a kind of State of the Union, summing up the junta's accomplishment after one year in power.

Six months before he wrote the letter, Walsh's eldest daughter, a Montonero combatant, shot herself in the head after being trapped by a military ambush. Separately, Walsh's house was ransacked; numerous close friends – academics, unionists, intellectuals, writers – were kidnapped and, in the Kafkaesque parlance of the time, "went disappeared." For Walsh, who had just turned fifty, there seemed to be nothing left to lose.

On the day Walsh posted the letter, fifteen thousand Argentines had disappeared, ten thousand political prisoners were being held without trial or formal charges, four thousand were dead, and tens of thousands more had fled the country: what Walsh called "the raw numbers of this terror." During the next six years the terror would continue unabated and the number of victims would increase exponentially – thirty thousand dead is an oft-cited number, though a reliable count has yet to be established.

The carnage was the grim natural extension of the executions Walsh had described

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twenty years earlier in *Operation Massacre*. By 1977, the details of those executions seemed almost quaint, especially Walsh's frustration about the impotence of the courts in dealing with the crime. By the mid 1970s, the judicial system had become a shell of its former self, existing only to rubber stamp government crimes.

Once torture became official policy, its techniques taught in military schools, there was no end to what it could entail: the rack, the drill, the blowtorch, and, in the case of at least one kidnapped Peronist, being skinned alive. During my companion's times in prison, in 1974, a young man died while being tortured in a room next to her cell. Business as usual in those nightmarish days.

But Walsh's letter is more than a list of abominations. He is acutely aware of the less obvious toll of terror – the psychological and moral stain that it spreads through victim and torturer and passive citizen alike, becoming an ineradicable part of the collective consciousness. "You have arrived at a form of absolute, metaphysical torture that is unbounded by time," Walsh writes, directly addressing the members of the junta. "The original goal of obtaining information has been lost in the disturbed minds of those inflicting the torture. Instead, they have ceded to the impulse to pommel human substance to the point of breaking it and making it lose its dignity, which the executioner has lost, and which you yourselves have lost."

No statement gives a more accurate or disturbing sense of this ethos than that of an officer of the junta who declared, "The battle we are waging knows neither moral nor natural limits; it takes place beyond good and evil."

Following the tautology of terror, the definition of a "subversive" widened to a surreal degree. Officials, civilians, and Montoneros alike cloaked themselves in the righteous, heightened language of war that allows for no line of thought beyond itself.

The president of the Sociedad Rural, the organization of large landowners whose support was critical to the junta's survival, felt perfectly justified in expressing his anger that "certain small but active groups keep insisting that food should be affordable." They too would be submitted to the blowtorch.

In fact, the economic hardships imposed by the junta amounted to another form of torture. Over the course of the junta's first year, Walsh points out, the consumption of food decreased by forty percent and the number of hours the average employee needed to work to cover his daily cost of living rose from six to eighteen. The annual inflation rate of 400 percent forced shopkeepers to raise prices from morning to afternoon. As I witnessed myself, many stopped accepting Argentine currency altogether, preferring US dollars, but settling for Brazilian cruzeiros (as they were called at the time) or even Bolivian pesos.

Walsh wrote the letter "with no hope of being heard, with the certainty of being persecuted, but faithful to the commitment I made a long time ago to bear witness during difficult times." The commitment began with the writing of *Operation Massacre* in 1956, and continued until his murder, the very day after he posted the letter and disseminated it to the local and foreign press. On March 25, 1977, Walsh was surrounded on a busy Buenos Aires street by a group of men with guns, shot, and carried away to be finished off, much like the victims of June 9, 1956, whom he has memorialized in this classic book.

"Silencio Es Salud" read a huge banner strung across Buenos Aires' most trafficked street during the bleakest days of the Dirty War. "Silence is Health" – a warning to a terrorized populace. Silence, in fact, is a dictatorship's greatest weapon. It is a warning that Walsh defied. In Argentina and in the rest of the world his work and life live on as a beacon of intellectual and political integrity and courage.

CT

Obama's new victory

Norman Solomon on the threat to freedom that most of the US media ignored

There's something profoundly despicable about a Justice Department that would brazenly violate the First and Fourth Amendments while spying on journalists, then claim to be reassessing such policies after an avalanche of criticism – and then proceed, as it did this week, to gloat that those policies made possible a long prison sentence for a journalistic source.

Welcome to the Obama Justice Department.

While mouthing platitudes about respecting press freedom, the president has overseen methodical actions to undermine it. We should retire understated phrases like “chilling effect.” With the announcement from Obama's Justice Department towards the end of last month, the thermometer has dropped below freezing.

You could almost hear the slushy flow of public information turning to ice in the triumphant words of the US attorney who led the investigation after being hand-picked by Attorney General Eric Holder: “This prosecution demonstrates our deep resolve to hold accountable anyone who would violate their solemn duty to protect our nation's secrets and to prevent future, potentially devastating leaks by those who would wantonly ignore their obligations to safeguard classified information.”

Translation: This prosecution shows the depth of our contempt for civil liberties. Let this be a lesson to journalists and would-be leakers alike.

Audibly on the chopping block are provisions in the Bill of Rights such as “freedom ... of the press” and “no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”

No more confidentiality

The Obama administration's pernicious goal is to normalize circumstances where journalists can't credibly promise confidentiality, and potential leakers don't believe they can have it. The broader purpose is to destroy independent journalism – which is to say, actual journalism – which is to say, freedom of the press.

Impacts are crystal clear to just about any journalist who has done reporting that's much more than stenographic services for official government and corporate sources. When unofficial sources are choked off, not much is left other than the Official Story.

The Official Story is routinely somewhere between very selective and mendacious. A case in point, ironically enough, is the Justice Department's righteous announcement

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While mouthing platitudes about respecting press freedom, the president has overseen methodical actions to undermine it

Hours after the Justice Department's announcement that its surveillance of AP phone records had resulted in a lengthy prison sentence, the PBS "NewsHour" did not devote a word to it

that the prison term for the leaker of information to The Associated Press reflected the Department's "deep resolve to hold accountable anyone who would violate their solemn duty to protect our nation's secrets."

"Hold accountable anyone"? (Laugh, scream or cry; take your pick.)

Like others before it, the Obama administration has made a frequent practice of leaking classified "secrets" to media outlets - when its calculus is that revealing those secrets will make the administration look good. Of course in those cases the Justice Department doesn't bother to track down the leakers.

Such extreme hypocrisy in high places has become so normalized that major media outlets often seem completely inured to it.

No worthy of comment

Hours after the Justice Department's announcement that its surveillance of AP phone records had resulted in a lengthy prison sentence, the PBS "NewsHour" did not devote a word to it. Perhaps the program could not find a few seconds to shave off the lengthy beach-ball interview that Judy Woodruff conducted with former President Clinton.

To the top echelons of quasi-journalistic enterprises that are bankrolled by corporate advertisers and underwriters, the disappearance of confidentiality - along with routine violations of the First and Fourth Amendments - might hardly matter. Official sources flood the media zone.

But the New York Times coverage should

have given attentive readers indigestion over breakfast Tuesday: "A former F.B.I. agent has agreed to plead guilty to leaking classified information to The Associated Press about a foiled bomb plot in Yemen last year ... Federal investigators said they were able to identify the man, Donald Sachtleben, a former bomb technician, as a suspect in the leak case only after secretly obtaining AP reporters' phone logs, a move that set off an uproar among journalists and members of Congress of both parties when it was disclosed in May."

The Times added: "Sachtleben ... has agreed to serve 43 months in prison for the leak, the Justice Department said. His case is the eighth leak-related prosecution under the Obama administration. Only three such cases were prosecuted under all previous presidents."

How did the Justice Department catch Sachtleben in the first place? By seizing records of calls on more than 20 phone lines used by Associated Press reporters over a two-month period.

This is more than a chilling effect on the First Amendment; it's an icy wind, threatening to put real freedom of the press into a deep freeze. Journalists - and the rest of us - should respond with outraged opposition.

CT

Norman Solomon is co-founder of RootsAction.org and founding director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His books include "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." Information about the documentary based on the book is at http://www.warmadeeasythemovie.org

Read excerpts from some of the hottest new books in ColdType: http://coldtype.net/reader.html

Supertankers on the Great White Slushie

Michael I. Niman looks at global warming's latest feedback loop

Global warming has triggered an array of environmental feedback loops, such as one starting with the melting of permafrost, which exposes frozen bogs unleashing ancient methane – a greenhouse gas with 20 times the climate impact of carbon dioxide – whose subsequent increase in the atmosphere accelerates warming, causing more permafrost to melt, exposing more bogs, releasing more methane.

While the speed at which some of these environmental loops have kicked in has caught scientists by surprise, predictions of their emergence has long been central to climate science. Less predictable, however, are the insane human behavior feedback loops, where the warming climate triggers a self-destructive pathological greed within corporate culture, ultimately driving humans to find new ways to accelerate climate destruction, and ultimately, the destruction of their own societies.

If you want to be shocked by the speed at which global warming is changing the earth, just look north to the melting Arctic. The idea of the North Pole as a watery destination in the middle of a newly thawed ocean is fast becoming a reality, while hurricane flooding of coastal American cities is giving us a preview of what our future will look like once a liquified Arctic is set loose on the world's oceans. Rational minds might recoil in horror. For the corporate mind, however, every catastrophe presents an opportunity

for profit. And the corporation, by design and charter, is a rapacious sociopath existing only to extract wealth from social and ecological environments. Corporations look to the melting north and they see money.

Global warming is rewriting the maps of the seas, with the most radical new map being at the top of the globe, where an ancient world of ice is quickly being transformed into a salty, vanilla-looking slushie. Last summer's unprecedented Arctic melt left the Arctic Ocean with just half the ice cover that we saw as recently as the 1980s and 1990s. The new Arctic map shows an ocean, complete with shipping lanes, bordering the US, Russia, Canada, Norway, and Greenland, where every shore in this circular sea looks north.

As has historically been the case with all new trade route maps, there's international bickering. The US is claiming a right to ply the new "international waters," but maps have traditionally shown this ocean as a solid, normally associated with national land masses. The Russians are claiming control of their former ice mass, while the US and Canada are still hashing out who controls what, when frozen, was once Canada.

Entering this strange new world are the new global economic powerhouses. As our northern summer winds down, a Korean oil tanker is now heading from Korea toward Rotterdam, shaving 4,370 miles off its normal 13,670-mile route, which had run south of In-

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Since before the industrial revolution, the dumping of poisons into the commons has been a massive wealth transfer not just from the masses to the wealthy owners of polluting industries, but from future generations to this generation's eco-criminals
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dia and up through the Suez Canal, by charting a new course north of Russia and Alaska. Hyundai's shipping subsidiary, Hyundai Glovis, plans regular shipping on this route.

Also seaborne is a Chinese merchant ship, the Yong Sheng, loaded with heavy equipment and steel, following the same path from China into the North Atlantic, via the great white slushie. Both Korea and China are deferring to Russian authority in what is becoming known as the Northeast Passage. This was a simple business decision. Bickering over who gets to control the sea lanes would hold up "progress" for a decade or more. Somebody has to run the ice-breakers and control the traffic. It might as well be the Russians, since they they're already there running the franchise. Profit before war.

The new route links energy-hungry China to both its largest market, Europe, and to Russian oil and gas reserves. This is a double climate feedback loop, both exposing more carbon and methane reserves for transformation into greenhouse gasses and making it easier and cheaper to move inexpensive trinkets from China to European and eastern North American markets. The fuel saved with the shorter route will be offset by the increased extraction of cheaper-to-move Arctic oil and gas, and by the increased consumer demand for easier-to-ship junk made with fossil-fired electricity.

The new route does pose what the business press refers to as "risks." Currently there are few ports and fewer facilities capable of repairing large ships in the Arctic, leaving no real plan for dealing with storm- or ice-damaged ships, as well as mechanical breakdowns or on-board fires. In corporate calculus, however, "risk" is just an economic variable, like the tens of thousands of shipping containers that topple into the ocean each year. As with rotting produce in a supermarket, the profit equation accounts for spoilage and loss. And as with the containers of computers and smartphones and pesticides that poison our oceans, the only cost that makes its way onto the balance sheets is the eco-

conomic cost of the lost ship or cargo, not the much greater and much longer-lasting environmental costs.

This is the same magic math that floats the nuclear power industry. Profit is privatized, but risk is socialized. Since before the industrial revolution, the dumping of poisons into the commons has been a massive wealth transfer not just from the masses to the wealthy owners of polluting industries, but from future generations to this generation's eco-criminals. Hence it should come as no surprise that when investors talk about the risks of Arctic shipping, the conversation ends with a calculation, never embarking on a discussion about the risks to global ocean ecosystems and the animals and people whose health depends upon them. We don't know how to clean up an oil spill in the great white slushie. All we know how to do is, in the worst case, fold up a corporation and protect its investors from liability associated with the corporation's depraved indifference to earthly life.

Since 2009, commercial shipping in the Arctic has increased by a factor of 10. Currently this amounts to about 10 commercial ships per year, increasing to about 55 next year. Russia and Korea have big plans to deploy fleets of ice-breakers to aid commercial shipping, while shipyards in India and Korea are gearing up to build ice-fortified tankers and cargo ships.

Most of the information I've seen on the coming Arctic shipping boom comes from the business press, which for the most part looks at the melting Arctic not as the latest event in an ongoing global environmental catastrophe, but instead simply as an investment opportunity. Get in, make some quick money, and spend it while you still can. Maybe buy a chateau on the moon. It's no different than driving by a burning house and placing your first call to your broker to invest in fire trucks. Seeing the melting Arctic as an investment opportunity is symptomatic of a threat even more serious, perhaps, than global warming. **CT**

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Michael I. Niman
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Tilting at easy targets

David Cromwell tells how an ‘highly ideological’ liberal mindset influences the debate on global warming

When a senior UN climate official warns that the world is ‘heading for a heart attack’ (the *Times*, September 23, 2013), there is clearly no time to lose in taking the radical action necessary to avert disaster. But we also have to understand why it is that no matter how many scientific warnings and ‘wake up calls’ are issued, we are still headed for climate chaos.

The standard liberal view is that climate sceptics have a heavy burden of responsibility for boosting climate confusion and derailing any rational attempts to constrain business as usual. If only the media would stop giving them so much attention, a healthy public debate could take place, followed by real action to combat rapid climate change. Thus, in the *Observer* on September 22, economist Will Hutton warned that:

‘Sceptics will rubbish a new report on climate change, dismissing calls for governmental action. Don’t be swayed.’

The forthcoming Fifth Assessment Report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will:

‘be met by a barrage of criticism from the new “sceptical” environmental movement – almost entirely on the political right.’

‘Don’t be bamboozled’, he continued, ‘as Britain’s centre-right media move to join with the sceptics to rubbish a careful body of scientific work that has been arrived at by

exhaustive cross-examination.’

Hutton rightly called for ‘collective action’ to ‘minimise the risk’ of the ‘terrifying’ effects of climate change, and he criticised the ‘highly ideological rightwing mind [which] does not think in this way.’ For those clinging to that ‘faith system’, climate change is ‘necessarily a gigantic scam, backdoor socialism’ and the IPCC itself is ‘the product of Marxists and deluded socialists.’ Clearly, such a mindset is not based on reality.

Hutton then turned to the BBC in his list of targets:

‘BBC attempts to broadcast [the IPCC’s] findings in as impartial way as possible will be portrayed as yet more evidence of BBC bias, even though the BBC will pack its coverage with lots of sceptical voices, notwithstanding their marginalisation by world science, to try to cover its back. By the week’s end, the risk is you will be less certain than you are now, tempted to join the apparent new consensus that there is no need for an urgent response. The sceptics will have done their job and national – let alone international – action will be more remote.’

No doubt Hutton’s piece came across to many as a powerful, valiant plea for enlightened rationalism. And he made several good points, as indicated. But, in reality, it was yet another example of the hobbled analysis on climate change routinely offered up by the Guardian-Observer flag-

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The Goebbels handbook must be well thumbed, marked, highlighted, with multiple page corners inward bent by now, in Washington, London and Paris

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In the West, we can drink it, bathe in it, brush our teeth with it, be told to take it for our health; we can spray it on our growing food, incorporate it in building materials, paint in on wooden doors, window frames, furniture. But in Syria it is “poison gas” and “nerve gas”

.....

ship of liberal journalism.

Consider Hutton’s remark in his article about ‘the astonishing political economy of Britain’s media.’ As Hutton naively sees it, ‘the duty of newspapers [is] to impart information as objectively and truthfully as possible, keeping comment rigorously separate.’ This noble aim, based on the false notion of a ‘firewall’ between news and comment has, he claims, ‘been progressively dropped’, making it sound like a discarded fashion accessory. In Hutton’s seriously restricted perspective, the ‘duty of newspapers’ is supposedly independent of the extreme concentration of profit-seeking media ownership, heavy subsidies in the form of advertising revenue, and a lapdog reliance on the endless musings and mutterings of government and business leaders (see here). But for Hutton these fundamental features of the corporate media pass without mention. Instead, he steers clear of any structural analysis of ‘the astonishing political economy of Britain’s media’ and instead goes for the usual easy targets:

‘Right-of-centre newspapers are now edited ruthlessly to make their readers think what their editors and proprietors want – on immigration, welfare, Europe, tax, political affiliation or whatever. Climate change has joined the list.’

And so Hutton has nothing to say about his own paper which, like the rest of the corporate press, is dependent on advertising revenue for around 60 per cent of its income. Nor does he have anything to say about how embedded his employers are in a corporate-financial-establishment network with links to banking, industry, fossil fuels and big business. As ever, even the best ‘liberal journalism’ routinely ignores what we have called the ‘Eight Corporate Media Unmentionables’. Here are just three of them:

The inherently biocidal, indeed psychopathic, logic of corporate capitalism, structurally locked into generating maximised revenues in minimum time at minimum corporate cost.

The proven track record of big business in promoting catastrophic consumption regardless of the consequences for human and environmental health.

The lethal role of the corporate media in promoting the planet-devouring aims of private power.

All of these factors are essentially excluded from the media agenda, thus extinguishing any hopes for a fully rational discussion of climate chaos and how to avoid it.

.....

Don’t Mention The Media!

Veteran environment journalist Geoffrey Lean similarly dodged the real media issues in a blog piece on the Daily Telegraph website. At first sight, Lean said, the climate sceptics have ‘been winning the battle for public opinion’. He referred to a recent survey showing that ‘the proportion of Britons who believe the world’s climate is not changing has increased almost fourfold since 2005 from four to 19 per cent, and almost doubled in the last year.’ However, as Lean rightly pointed out, the overwhelming majority of the population has nevertheless consistently rejected the misleading, anti-scientific propaganda from the sceptic lobby.

Although this lobby is small, they are very well-funded – typically by cynical business interests – and they continue to mobilise ‘far more effectively than their opponents’. As a prime example of this, Lean refers to a small number of errors in the thousands of pages of earlier IPCC work which were:

‘brilliantly exploited by the sceptics and massively mishandled by the scientists, causing an erosion in the IPCC’s authority among the public and the press alike.’

Lean continued:

‘Ever since the scientific community has come off worse in the public debate, often undermined by its tendency to focus on uncertainties, while the sceptics betrayed no doubt.’

So scientists have let themselves down, in Lean's eyes. What about the green pressure groups?

'There is less excuse for the environmental groups, whose very purpose is to make a case to the public, press and policymakers, and thus bring about change. But they too largely quit the field when the controversy began. Friends of the Earth, for example, declined to enter the lists on behalf of the scientists at the University of East Anglia whose emails were leaked in November 2009 – and in some cases skilfully misrepresented by the sceptics – because they had not yet held a meeting to discuss it. They finally held their meeting, and issued a statement, months after the event. The inconvenient truth is that all too often the pressure groups, dependent on popular support for funds, are shamefully reluctant to battle a head wind.'

Media Lens, too, has pointed out the sorry state of environmentalism today (see here, here and here), particularly among the big pressure groups upon which so many green hopes were once placed. Where we differ in our diagnosis from Lean, however, is that the biggest 'inconvenient truth' is that the major green groups have become ever more neutered, compromised and even aligned with 'mainstream' political 'debate'. Given the public's deep discontent with the majority of politicians and the media, the smart thing for environment groups to do would be to be boldly challenge the existing power and class structure that is pursuing its own selfish ends at the expense of the planet and most of humanity. That means exposing the very corporate nature of society that is crushing us; not appealing to big business to be a little bit less lethal.

When Lean was environment editor at the *Independent on Sunday*, a reader challenged him to look at the global economic system of capitalism as a root cause of climate instability. Lean wasn't having any of it:

'Why don't you really read what we have been writing over the years rather than relying on media lens?' (email, February 18, 2005)

In other words, don't even bother raising the issue! And certainly don't consider the possibility that a corporate media might be promoting inaction in response to a problem caused by corporate interests.

In his blog piece, Lean pointed to the solid public support in favour of climate science and renewable energy, concluding feebly:

'All, of which perhaps goes to show that the public are less swayed by media and political fashion than those of us working in those fields like to believe. To be honest, I find that reassuring. But I guess I would, wouldn't I?'

At least the veteran journalist recognises his own lack of concern, verging on smugness, that the public should not be concerned by the corporate media and 'political fashion'. All this from one of the best environment journalists in the country.

'The Primary Loyalty Is To Corporate Backers'

Paul Vallely, a former colleague of Lean's, wrote along similar lines in a piece for the *Independent on Sunday* titled, 'Whatever happened to climate change?' The two key reasons for the public remaining supposedly unconvinced of the need for radical action are 'the complexity of the science and the simplistic nature of much media reporting, some of which is wilfully ignorant.' Those factors are relevant, but Vallely's attempt at an explanation avoids essential facts about power in society. Sadly, this visiting professor in public ethics and media at the University of Chester is yet another example of a liberal commentator who appears ignorant of the propaganda nature and function of the corporate media. Again, the easy targets were selected:

The Goebbels-like propaganda regarding these exports to Syria are nonsense. We are back in the "dual use" game, used to such devastation in Iraq, where we were told cancer medications, containing minute radiation content, and toxicity, could be converted into chemical or nuclear weaponry. It was, of course, utter fiction

.....
"Pentagon
'sources' said it
would need up
to 75,000 armed
troops to protect
the chemical
inspectors.
Seventy-five
thousand! If that
isn't boots on the
ground, I don't
know what is."
The fix is in
.....

'So the public is swayed by media agendas. Rupert Murdoch, a man who believes what he reads in his own newspapers, from the Wall St Journal to The Australian, has been tweeting against climate change and in favour of fracking. Small wonder that Australia's new prime minister, Tony Abbott, who once dismissed evidence of climate change as "absolute crap", has on Day Two of his premiership, disbanded a key climate change agency.'

The agency has since been resurrected thanks to enormous public support in Australia, horrified at Abbot's actions. Murdoch and his News International empire do indeed represent a disaster for fair and balanced news, as the liberal press have no trouble pointing out. But looking closer to home is simply taboo.

Vallely then continues with some critical comments of the BBC, albeit limited to what should be obvious:

'Meanwhile here BBC news outlets – normally a voice of sanity on science – are paralysed by their adversarial paradigm of giving "equal space" to both sides. Faced with the prospect of having to give climate change deniers the same airtime as the 97 per cent scientific consensus the BBC has largely descended into silence on the issue. The BBC has a bigger responsibility than balance here.'

No hint here from Vallely that the BBC is cosily nestled within the establishment, routinely broadcasting news that is heavily biased towards protecting western state and corporate interests. Moreover, despite Vallely's professed public ethics and media

credentials, there is apparently no problem with the oligarch-owned Independent newspapers, part of a much larger business and financial empire that includes banking, fossil fuel and 'defence' interests.

Perhaps we need to turn to a funny and smart comedian like Russell Brand to spell things out, as he did after addressing the GQ Men of the Year awards ceremony recently:

'We witness that there is a relationship between government, media and industry that is evident even at this most spurious and superficial level. These three institutions support one another. We know that however cool a media outlet may purport to be, their primary loyalty is to their corporate backers. We know also that you cannot criticise the corporate backers openly without censorship and subsequent manipulation of this information.'

Yes, this wonderfully astute article did appear in the Guardian. But, once again, the Guardian itself was seemingly exempt from open criticism. This might not matter much except that when it happens over and over again, across even the 'best' media, then the narrow confines of 'the climate debate' are further skewed away from what needs to be understood, and what needs to be done. The consequences for human society and planetary ecosystems in an era of impending climate chaos are awesome indeed. **CT**

.....
David Cromwell is the co-editor of Medialens, the British media watchdog – <http://medialens.org> His latest book is "Why Are We The Good Guys?" (Zero Books)

**Read the Best of Frontline Magazine at:
<http://coldtype.net/frontline.html>**

It's policies with teeth that get us into trouble

The public's reluctance to go to war reflects more sensible attitudes to conflict resolution than warfare, writes **Philip Kraske**

Does public reluctance in America and Europe to using force in Syria indicate a new isolationism? Does it mean indifference to crimes against humanity? Does it mean an “inward turn,” as a September article by Judy Dempsey, the *New York Times* columnist, indicates?

“If Europeans refuse to consider force as a last option to support diplomatic efforts,” she writes, “analysts believe that the European Union’s foreign policy will be toothless.” And Dempsey, whose byline reads “editor in chief of Strategic Europe at Carnegie Europe,” is one of those analysts. She might have used a plain “me and the guys around the water cooler believe,” but “analysts believe” definitely has more brio.

You read of such worrying about European and American publics all the time these days in the mainstream media. The cover story of the *Economist* in late September is called “The Weakened West” and shows a defanged lion. Yet you can never finish these hand-wringing meditations without an odd taste in your mouth. These analysts and the foreign policy elite in general, especially the American type, are peeved these days – peeved with the public. For they like their foreign policy toothy. In her article, Dempsey sounds like a kid whose kite has been taken away, or at least reeled in a great deal. Without that wonderful length and the bracing

dips and dives, kite-flying just isn’t much fun.

We heard pouting of the same tenor when Edward Snowden’s revelations first started to come out. They lifted the lovely embroidered curtain of intelligence and espionage, and the elites – military, security, foreign-policy – and their fellow-travelling mainstream columnists did not like it. Fareed Zakaria on CNN called Snowden’s efforts “a kind of vague nihilistic anarchism.”

Deeper truth

The Snowden revelations and Dempsey’s article – and again, it is just one of many concerned about “toothlessness” – point out the deeper truth that the gap between elites and publics is growing. For the American elite in particular, the public is now the enemy, a sulky teenager that will not listen to reason and takes drugs as soon as one’s back is turned.

Or as the veteran commentator William Pfaff asked in his article “The American Top Secret Kept from Americans”, “What crime is Edward Snowden accused of committing? Not his revelation of American global eavesdropping on foreign governments, which every major government in the world already knew of, or took for granted as existing. Snowden is an international political fugitive because he revealed to the American people

.....
For the American elite in particular, the public is now the enemy, a sulky teenager that will not listen to reason and takes drugs as soon as one’s back is turned

.....
Analysts and whining columnists regularly adduce Europe's comparatively skimpy spending on defense as evidence of European spinelessness. Nonsense
.....

what their own government was doing.”

And because Americans cannot be convinced to attack peoples with whom they have no bone to pick, they must be shocked into action, whether by 9-11 or horror stories of Iraqi WMD stockpiles or, now, by images of gassed children in Syria. And here, I add this aside: When 9-11 Truthers say that the U.S. military-security complex was the prime mover of the attacks, Americans usually dismiss the idea this way: “Our government would never do that to us.” But people would do well to reflect on the Truthers theories in relation to the sea of disgust and suspicion that has spread between rulers and ruled in America. If the Snowden revelations mean anything, it is that the former group is far more hard-eyed than the latter has imagined.

.....
Jolted awake

And now the American public has been jolted awake. It is quite right to second-guess the judgment of its foreign-policy elite, whose policies with teeth have given us nothing but disaster over the past ten years. It has not left a single situation better than it found it, whether in Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Yemen.

I was relieved to see that Dempsey admitted this at the very end of her article: “The instability now in [Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan] has, as the Transatlantic Trends report shows, encouraged skepticism among Europeans and Americans about the use of force.”

But Dempsey and those “analysts” take negative opinion polls on the Syrian matter as reluctance to engage internationally. This, I think, is a misreading of the publics on both sides of the Atlantic. They are not more cowardly, just more cautious and more informed.

Why? First, the Internet. The mainstream media’s power to shape public opinion on that last bastion of the elite, foreign policy, has been diluted. Back in the 70s and 80s, when I was studying International Relations

at the University of Minnesota, the foreign policy debates were basically contained between the *New York Times* for the liberals (or are we saying “progressives” these days?) and *Time* magazine or the *Wall Street Journal* for the conservatives.

The Internet, of course, has now made this seem like little more than a debate between Pepsi and Coca-cola. Now all of those publications occupy one side of the debate and Internet websites occupy the other. Though websites are of greater and lesser credibility, they make it hard for the mainstream media to slant the news without getting caught.

And hence the second reason. The mainstream media are more and more considered to represent a powerful business and political elite, some of it American, but most of it with dark international loyalties. This has provoked great suspicion. One of the things that struck me immediately about the Occupy Movement was its rhetoric, “talking back to power;” “the government’s propaganda machine.” It was stuff taken straight out of Noam Chomsky, John Pilger, and Chris Hedges. Clearly, leftist voices such as these have made inroads; a good part of the public is reading the news more critically.

If there is reluctance over Syria, it’s because people have looked at both sides of the question. They’ve digested more information, more opinions. And the arguments against engagement are articulate and coherent. So people are not convinced.

Analysts and whining columnists regularly adduce Europe’s comparatively skimpy spending on defense as evidence of European spinelessness. Nonsense. European governments simply see no reason to stretch already-thin budgets. Why should they? There is no Hitler around these days. There is no communist threat to be turned back, no nationalist madman threatening his neighbors. Al Qaeda? A terrorist group that must be dealt with through espionage, infiltration, and the occasional fly-swatter, but not a cannon.

Europeans maintain thin, utilitarian mili-

taries that can keep up with military technology, send enough soldiers to assuage America's thirst for intervention, and make decent showings in Memorial Day parades. Europeans have seen how the Pentagon has pitilessly spent the country into debt, and they want no part of it.

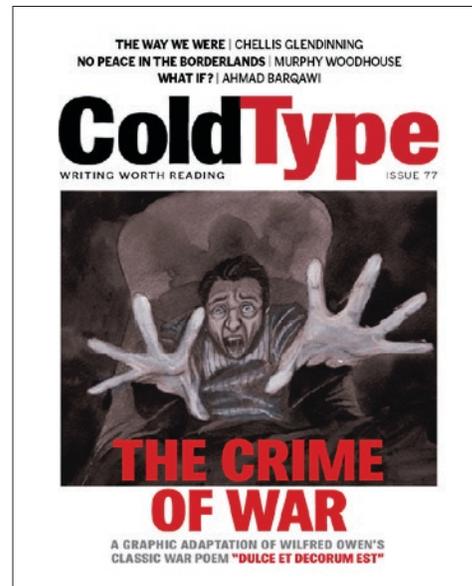
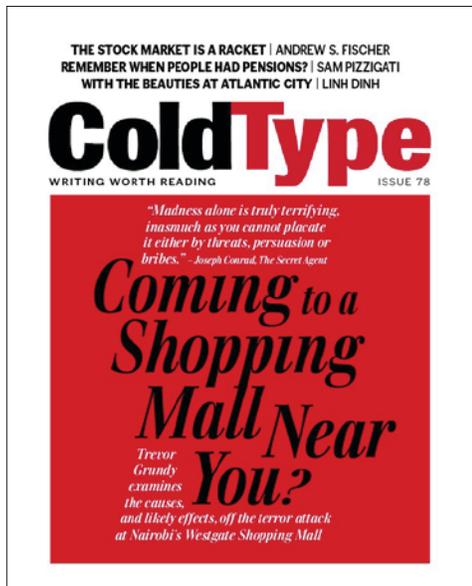
Besides, military force is not the only power behind foreign policy. Just ask the Iranians. They want out from under sanctions. Or ask American members of Congress about European reluctance regarding genetically modified seeds. Or ask the chic Mrs. Assad if she's planning a shopping spree on the Champs-Élysées once her husband has taken care of those nasty rebels. Most likely she's

going to stick with eBay.

No, I don't see the reluctance, the reticence or the toothlessness that Ms. Dempsey bemoans. I see European and American publics that are a tougher sell for war. The reaction of Europeans and Americans to a real threat in the world? Hard to say. But both peoples know perfectly well what Hitlers and Napoleons and Stalins look like, and I think they would know what to do. **CT**

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Military force is not the only power behind foreign policy. Just ask the Iranians. They want out from under sanctions

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Philip Kraske's latest book "The City On The Ledge", is available at Amazon.com. Subscribe to ColdType and we'll give you an ebook of his novel, "Flight In February" – send an email to subs@coldtype.net



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From Berkeley to Mexico City

Chellis Glendinning finds inspiration in Paco Ignacio Taibo's book, '68

.....
Through the years, our homegrown protoplasmic mass had forged a shared strategy for moving across campus and through the streets in the face of flying wedges and flailing nightsticks, shotguns and CS gas
.....

*"The General Public has no notion
Of what's behind the scenes.
They vote at times with some emotion
But don't know what it means."*
- W. H. Auden, 1935

I thank my lucky stars I was in Berkeley in 1968. Every noon I'd wend my way to Sproul Plaza, greet Michael Lerner at the political table he had fought for during the Free Speech Movement, grab a yogurt with Marty Schiffenbauer in his shorts and combat boots - and get my political education as expounded from a microphone on the steps. Eldridge Cleaver, Joan Baez, Phil Ochs, Michael Rossman, Angela Davis, Frank Bardacke, Pete Camejo, Dolores Huerta - they were our teachers. With

predictable frequency we'dtear-ass down Telegraph Avenue brandishing our anti-war placards or take on the Oakland Induction Center with shields made of

garbage-can lids, and invariably we'd be met by the Berkeley Police, the Oakland Police, the National Guard, and/or the Alameda County Sheriff's Department, nicknamed The Blue Meanies for their blue-clad counterparts in Yellow Submarine.

I graduated in 1969 with a degree in social sciences, but by both academic curriculum and in-the-street practicum it was a degree in social revolution. I graduated Phi Beta Kappa, which I figured meant that I had laid the ground for a career. Indeed I have spent my life exploring and elaborating on the theme.

The lessons of the movement were many and varied. One of my most memorable had to do with group mind. The insight came about not in the formality of social psychology class, but in the upheaval of the plaza. The summer after People's Park thousands of energized students from elsewhere came pouring into Berkeley to get their credentials in social protest. In the presence of their innocence I saw that, through the years, our homegrown protoplasmic mass had forged a shared strategy for moving across campus and through the streets in the face of flying wedges and flailing nightsticks, shotguns and CS gas: we had evolved a way to hold the line and protect each other at the same time. But these newcomers: they were disconnected from each other, incoherent in their sum, given to chaos rather than resistance.

Another lesson was the psychic challenge



'69
Paco Ignacio Taibo
(Seven Stories Press)
\$12.95

made by the claustrophobia felt in a cell made for one, now packed with 100. I dealt with the feeling of enforced enclosure by marking the three or four steps to the tiny bathroom as if they constituted a day hike in Tilden Park, then looking out the crack in the frosted window at the farthest thing: the barbed wire.

Algeria, Cuba, Columbia, Prague, Paris – these buoyed us to our best courage. We were outraged at Che’s assassination in Bolivia, and Mao’s *Little Red Book* festooned our book bags along with the *Port Huron Statement*, *Soul on Ice*, and *The Wretched of the Earth*. We knew we stood in historic moment amid the decolonization and liberation movements of the world.

But somehow Mexico City escaped us.

1968. There was a social uprising as populous and anarchistic as ours. It was as fraught with youthful idealism and factional fighting as ours. It spilled over onto the streets with the same flair and resolution. But on the night of October 2 the apartments surrounding Tlatelolco Square were summarily evacuated, and in the absence of witnesses 400 student protestors were shot dead by federal troops, their bodies trucked away and dumped into the Gulf of Mexico. Hundreds more were arrested and imprisoned for years afterward. It was classic Latin America/School of the Americas terror.

Looking back, there’s little mystery as to why knowledge of the Mexico City massacre did not hit the airwaves in the US. By the morning of October 3 the bodies were nowhere to be found. The bloodied sidewalks had been washed clean – protestors and non-protestors alike sufficiently silenced – and the Mexican government denied it all.

Then the corporate media dazzled the world with its slick kaleidoscope of Mexico City’s Olympics. I didn’t hear about Tlatelolco until the mid-’90s when one night in San Francisco’s Mission District I happened upon a film made by a survivor.

Indeed, it took Paco Ignacio Taibo II 20 years to mount his nagging memory for the telling. 68 is his report.

Taibo left the movement soon after Tlatel-

olco, dazed and empty, as did so many of his comrades. One of the chapter title essays it all: “Everyone Blamed Themselves – Forever.” He hid. He drifted. He married, divorced. He threw himself into meaningless jobs like writing horoscopes and telenovelas. Eventually he found his voice, writing over 50 books and winning the prestigious Bancarella Prize for a biography of Che Guevara.

But it took Taibo decades to excavate the piles of notes he had kept. And, with them, his memories.

Memory is the central theme of the book. Memory of the University Student Council taking to the streets. Memory of the sound of 300,000 marching in the *Manifestación del Silencio*. Of the V-for-victory sign and the raised fist. Of snatching paper for the mimeograph machine. Memory of Héctor Gama’s bulging eyeballs when the military vehicles rolled onto the esplanade at the Ciudad Universitaria. Of David Cortés hammering an armored tank’s hood with a metal pipe – and not making a dent. Memory of the relief at not being there when it happened. Memory of the guilt at not being there when it happened.

To my mind the book is not just one of the best on the period; it is one of the best I have ever read. As hilarious as a weed-induced laughing fit in the face of one of R. Crumb’s cartoons, as abrupt as a nightstick in the stomach, elegant in its braiding of words with silences – Taibo takes the reader on a seamless journey replete with colors and smells, political revelations and emotional swings. But the story of coming of age in an age of brutality is more than a walk down Memory Lane; it is threaded with the irony that can accompany adulthood, a state that arrived tragically early for the author, the direct result of Tlatelolco. Taibo’s gift as a human being is apparent: he lives in a state of wonder – and so the story is reported, regaled, and reflected upon with humility.

1968. If you were there and are called to remember – if you were not and want to understand – ‘68 is the book that will jar your memory of all things good and horrific. **CT**

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400 student protestors were shot dead by federal troops, their bodies trucked away and dumped into the Gulf of Mexico. Hundreds more were arrested and imprisoned for years afterward

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Chellis Glendinning is the author of six books. Her “*Off the Map: An Expedition Deep into Empire and the Global Economy*” and “*Chiva: A Village Takes on the Global Heroin Trade*” won the National Federation of Press Women book award in nonfiction, in 2000 and 2006 respectively. She lives in Bolivia

The declining beauty of Atlantic City

Linh Dinh goes to the home of the Miss America contest and is not impressed

.....
In 1987, a bunch of us were drunk enough to spontaneously drive down from Philly, with the intention of skinny dipping in the ocean, but when we got there, only I and Ms di Paola were still buzzed enough to do it
.....

Atlantic City peaked nearly a century ago, when it billed itself as “The World’s Playground.” Hyperbole and false hopes are its currencies. Trudging into glitzy casinos, badly dressed schmucks dream of instant wealth, yet leave with barely enough nickels and dimes for McDonald’s dollar menu. I know of a Chinatown waitress who shows up twice a year. In Philly, she’d hop on the bus in her vermilion blouse, crimson shoes and blazing underwear, all for luck, but by evening, she’d be crumpled outside Bally’s, lamenting her fate, in Cantonese mostly, and even sobbingly demanding a partial refund so she could get a proper meal before riding home. For six bucks, she can chow down on two cheesesteak egg rolls at Boardwalk Grill. They’re not bad, apparently, but I haven’t tried them, for when I shambled by that one evening, I was down to two pennies, though not from gambling.

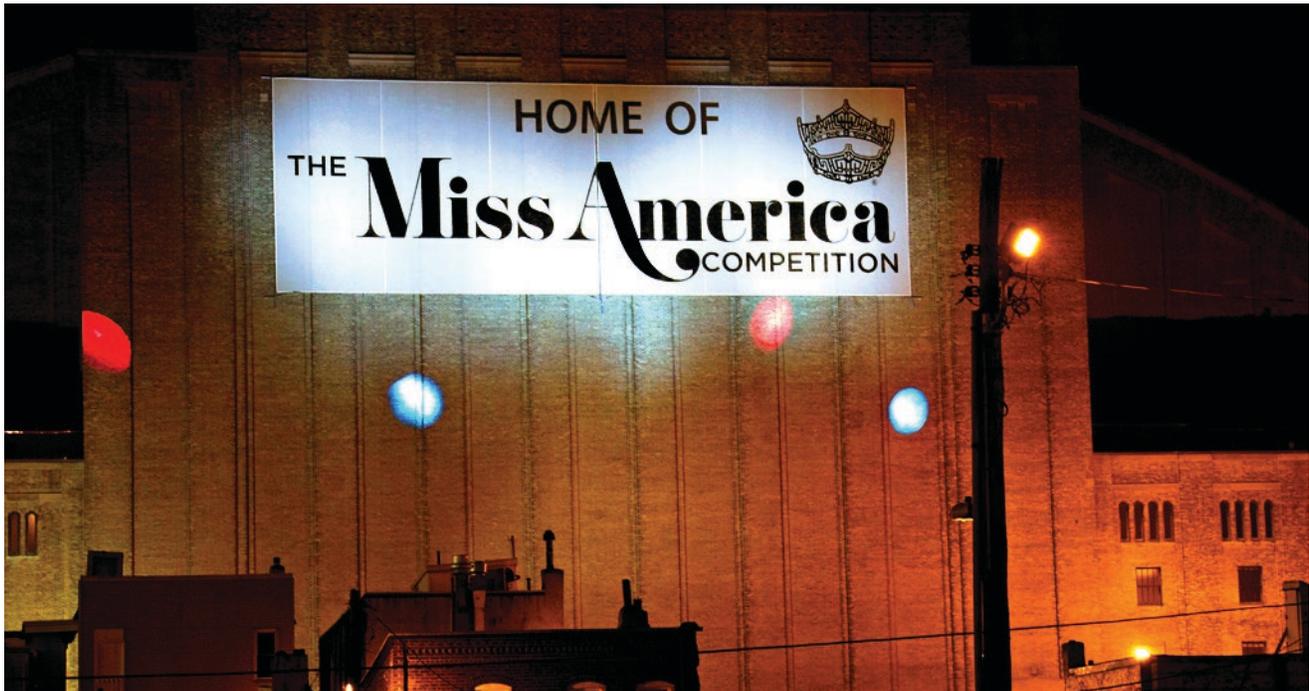
I’ve been to Atlantic City many times, but never to gamble, since I don’t get a special thrill out of donating what little money I have to huge corporations. In 1987, a bunch of us were drunk enough to spontaneously drive down from Philly, with the intention of skinny dipping in the ocean, but when we got there, only I and Ms di Paola were still buzzed enough to do it.

In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, a pioneering feminist novel published in 1899, the

heroine got bored of being a (rich) mother and wife, so escaped into art and adultery, only to end up wading into the sea naked. Swimming further and further out, knowing there’s no turning back and becoming increasingly exhausted, she frantically reviewed her life for possible meanings. A conjured voice mocked her, “And you call yourself an artist! What pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies.”

A bona fide artist or writer can spring from any place, no matter how provincial, ridiculous or devoid of intellectual ambience, so there’s no reason why Atlantic City shouldn’t produce a cultural figure of note, but the only names that are even remotely connected to it are Allan Kaprow, the performance artist, and Valerie Solanas, best known as the woman who shot Andy Warhol. Living much of his life in NYC, Kaprow leaves no clues to his Atlantic City beginning, but in Solanas’ famous SCUM Manifesto, there’s this:

“Unhampered by propriety, niceness, discretion, public opinion, ‘morals,’ the ‘respect’ of assholes, always funky, dirty, low-down SCUM gets around.... and around and around.... they’ve seen the whole show – every bit of it – the fucking scene, the sucking scene, the dick scene, the dyke scene – they’ve covered the whole waterfront, been under every dock and pier – the peter pier, the pussy pier.... you’ve got to go through a



During the Miss America contest, one of the eliminated beauties actually declared on camera that she couldn't wait to get back to her hotel room to scarf Kentucky Fried Chicken

lot of sex to get to anti-sex, and SCUM's been through it all, and now they're ready for a new show; they want to crawl out from under the dock, move, take off, sink out."

In *Rootie Tootie*, composed in NYC, Thelonious Monk evoked the train whistles he had heard as a child in Rocky Mount, NC, so here Solanas resurrected Atlantic City though also living in Manhattan. (It's not clear when she left New Jersey, but in a *Village Voice* article from 1968, she was quoted as being old enough to surf.) In any case, the Atlantic City of Solanas' childhood predated the casino era, and was known mostly as the home of Miss America. Began in 1921, it's the world's longest-running beauty contest and one of its first.

Artistic flaws mirror defects in one's character, but without these distortions and perversions, there would be no art at all, and I'm not saying this as an endorsement of madness, for the artist should always struggle against himself to minimize his countless deficiencies, but for all her deformities, Solanas certainly did not lack courage, and in her tiny

surviving body of work, she is often sharp and very funny, as in "he'll swim through a river of snot, wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit, if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy awaiting him," and the insight is spot on, too, in a poetic kind of way, though not always, as we shall see. The flip side, also, is that men are known to shrink from a perfectly warm embrace because screwing, often, is not what it's really about, and these grown boys are also intrinsically anxiety-ridden and often cowardly. You rarely see a man attack another one-on-one, for example, or face on, but nearly always when he has his target grossly outnumbered, and from behind, too, with no warning, and even a much weaker man, or nation, is deemed too dangerous an opponent, so must be ganged up on, with a coalition, if necessary. Back to sex: Many women will sadly concur, from personal experiences, that a friendly pussy might just chase a man out the door. I mean, before he gets any. As Andrea Dworkin, someone who's undoubtedly indebted to Solanas though superior to her as both thinker and writer, observes,

.....
The Atlantic City of Solanas' childhood predated the casino era, and was known mostly as the home of Miss America

.....
Alone, a man can be monstrous enough, but when you band them together, drape them in spiffy uniforms then hand them the deadliest weapons available, what do you get? Heroes, of course!
.....

“Sexual intercourse is not intrinsically banal, though pop-culture magazines like *Esquire* and *Cosmopolitan* would suggest that it is. It is intense, often desperate. The internal landscape is violent upheaval, a wild and ultimately cruel disregard of human individuality, a brazen, high-strung wanting that is absolute and imperishable [...]” So a man may just swim through a river of snot, wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit, only to hesitate before the most forgiving of pussies.

It wasn't so long ago that the only Americans who placed personal ads were in their mid-thirties or older, but now, even our very young, buff or nubile can't find partners in their immediate physical environment. Pointing this out to a university audience once, I stated, perhaps not too tactfully, “If you can't get laid in college, you're not going to get laid.” We must be among the loneliest, most alienated population ever. We watch more TV than any other country, rank among the highest in porn consumption, which also means, by implication, that we're among the most vigorous of masturbators, and our divorce rate ranks third in the entire world, behind only Maldives and Belarus.

Many people crawl to sex to be forgiven, Valerie, so will you absolve me? Will you press me into your lovely belly button? By the way, have y'all come across this construction site witticism, “I'll eat a mile of her shit just to see where it came from”? Of course, that's not meant literally, but neither was the SCUM Manifesto. In any case, its central weakness is not its literary suggestion that all men should be killed, but its portrait of the ideal woman as one who's “dominant, secure, self-confident, nasty, violent, selfish, independent, proud, thrill-seeking, free-wheeling, arrogant [...] who trust only their own animal, gutter instincts [...] whose sole diversion is prowling for emotional thrills and excitement,” and the best way to get even with a man, for being a man, is to “ram an ice pick up his asshole,” so the fully realized woman should act like the worst kind of man, per Solanas. (Discussing the last voy-

age of Gulliver, Borges points out a similar blunder in Swift when he had his animals act like humans, and his humans like animals, a reversal that cancels itself out.)

What's not allegorical, successful or otherwise, are recent stories of men, in Boulder and Tulsa, who squeezed themselves into public toilets and piously waited in shit and piss to breathlessly admire, from below, not-exactly-amicable female posteriors. If only Swift and Solanas could comment on these cases. Though extreme, they implicate us all, for just as we're ready to bask in another's glory, we're also smeared and flecked by any other man's depravity. On balance, though, are men so foul and murderous? What, you don't read newspapers?

Alone, a man can be monstrous enough, but when you band them together, drape them in spiffy uniforms then hand them the deadliest weapons available, what do you get? Heroes, of course! And there were plenty on display during the latest Show Us Your Shoes Parade on the boardwalk. Riding in individual cars, Miss America contestants were shorn in over the top, custom-made shoes that embodied their states, all but Miss Kansas, who simply wore combat boots, along with her Army uniform, as she's an active soldier. Uniformed troops were also interspersed throughout this rather lackluster, low-budgeted affair, with the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force all represented. Not just patriotism, but militarism was in the air. Accompanied by roughly 60 children in red, white and blue, most holding flags or bunting, a local yokel twanged his way through Lee Greenwood's “God Bless the USA.” (To book Greenwood himself would have cost at least \$20,000, his fee in 2007.) Written in 1983, it has become an anthem to those who cheer any American war, including ones they haven't heard of. On YouTube, videos of this song are filled almost exclusively by images of soldiers.

Halfway through the parade, a group of perfectly ordinary looking women appeared, with several rather frumpy or fat, so it would



An old pizza joint, with "WELCOME TO ITALY" on its torn awning, now serves Mexican food primarily

not be unreasonable to assume these were simply ladies from a local organization that fight against some disease or vice, perhaps Mothers Against Driving while Drunk, High on Meth, Texting and Rapping. It came as a shock, to this observer at least, that these were all former Miss Americas! Subjected to a regiment of healthy eating and endless exercising, not to mention constant grinning whenever in public, these women apparently let go the second they got the crown. During the contest the next day, one of the eliminated beauties actually declared on camera that she couldn't wait to get back to her hotel room to scarf Kentucky Fried Chicken. Pressure over, let's kick back and balloon, American style, with six-packs of Bud and tubs of the Colonel's original recipe. Why not? Everybody else is doing it. Before she won, this year's winner was even caught on tape sneering at last year's queen, "She's fat as shit!" Then she, too, will turn to redolent earth before too long.

Dethroning woman as goddess, Swift uncovers and wallows in her actual shit. Debunking male pretensions, Solanas charges

that everything that comes from him is figuratively shit. Daily, actually several times daily, each of us is grounded, humbled, by this burden that cannot be properly assimilated into the culture, though it's spewed, often enough, from our mouths, out on the streets.

But enough of this, OK, I won't say it. Let's get off the boardwalk, for Atlantic City isn't just that. With less than 40,000 people, this is no city, really, but a town with two dozen high-rise hotels, and a daily influx of day trippers. On Pacific Avenue, just a long block from the ocean-fronted promenade, the seediness begins. Here, you can see cheap residential hotels, liquor stores, tattoo parlors, cash-for-gold dealers and strip joints. At A.C. Dolls, a sign advertises "Divorce Parties!" Even before dusk, prostitutes prowl, and there are plenty of cops also, to make sure no tourists get mugged, so unless you wander further inland, you won't likely be punctured and divested.

On a recent evening, I turned from Pacific onto South Georgia Avenue to photograph a curious sign, with "CASH FOR GOLD" over

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It took me a minute to get my shot right, and when I was done, some older guy sitting on a low step huffed, "You shouldn't be taking your camera out around here, man. Those people were saying they wanted to smash it
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"ROOMING HOUSE." In the distance, a dozen young people were hanging out in front of the well-lit porch of another flop mansion, with its shared bathrooms of antiquated fixtures, and thin mattresses draped in dull, gray sheets that flaunt constellations of stains and cigarette burns, like bruises and sores on a worn out body, though still sexy. In the dark, a bi-racial couple strolled towards me, the woman in hooded sweat, the man in knit cap. In this society, white men command just about every board room, while black dudes rule the sidewalks, at least those with folks still loitering on them. It took me a minute to get my shot right, and when I was done, some older guy sitting on a low step huffed, "You shouldn't be taking your camera out around here, man. Those people were saying they wanted to smash it!"

"Ah, they're always talking shit!"

Dude chuckled, "Yeah, you're right. They think they're gangsters, but they're just pranksters!"

A compact man in old dress shirt and pants, Bill Bringham was his name, and he was in Atlantic City to peddle programs at the Miss America Competition, with events all week-long leading to the finale on Sunday. He said it wasn't unusual for him to make \$250 a night, just selling programs on commission, and he had worked Eagles and Phillies games, too, and concerts. "Beyonce wanted me to go on tour with her, so I could sell her programs."

"You're full of shit!"

"You don't know, man, I'm good at what I do. I'm the best!"

He said his family arrived in the "1400's," and were among the first settlers of Germantown in Philadelphia. Well, Columbus reached the Americas in 1492, and Germantown wasn't founded until 1681, but maybe the Bringhursts were kidnapped by Martians, then dumped in Pennsylvania a couple hundred years earlier. Anything is possible. By this point, I was starting to wonder if here was just some homeless guy talking out of his ass, but hot air is all too common in a

city with a faux Taj Mahal, and where the last mayor lost his job for lying about being in the Green Berets during the Vietnam War. This he did to win the election, and to collect extra benefits from the Veterans Administration. As the expose heated up, Bob Levy simply disappeared for two weeks, leaving embarrassed A.C. without a mayor. It turned out this former life guard had checked himself into a mental health clinic. "The hope you deserve, the help you need. Depression. Anxiety. Bipolar Disorder. Schizophrenia."

Leaving Bringham, I ran into a man who had hung his jacket and khaki pants on an electric meter box outside Papa John's Pizza. "I like to mark my territory," David Aufiero explained. David's scheme was to buy Delilah's Den, the strip bar, "for maybe \$400,000. No more. They're really hurting. There are four strip bars within three blocks, and that's too many! I'll turn it into a special ed school." David also let out that his father had been a hitman for the Gambino, "like Carmen Campisi." Within two minutes David had told me all this, and given me his phone number also, then he disappeared.

I was left alone momentarily, but then a young, snub nosed girl in a pale, loose smock approached, "You have a cigarette?"

"Sorry, but I don't smoke."

"You have fifty cents?"

"Sorry, I'm broke."

"You don't have fifty cents?!" And her open mouth, green eyes and pretty snub nose beamed, fully, incredulity and disgust at my apologetic configuration, standing there in the half dark.

"Sorry, but I'm really broke," and I was really down to two pennies. I'd have loved to help her get a donut or beef jerky, but I had already spent too much that day, what with the train fare to Atlantic City, a corner store hoagie for both lunch and dinner, and cheap beer at Flanigan's, where I managed to meet a couple of locals. Had I more cash, I would have offered her (up to) 10 bucks to tell me her story, and she might say, "Fuck off," or, more likely, give me 20 minutes of her time.



David Aufiero saw me photographing his clothes and explained, "I like to mark my territory."

Most stories can be had for free, but it still takes efforts to gather them. When asked how she managed to achieve such a great ear for dialogue, Annie Proulx said that she'd simply sit in a public place and listen, and since she was a woman of a certain age, men'd leave her alone. William T. Vollmann paid prostitutes to talk about themselves, and as they confided, he'd sometimes jerk off, to reassure them he wasn't a cop. Solanas, though, charged men 50 cents for a dirty word, "men," and six bucks for an hour of conversation.

So to hear local stories and speech, I had found my way to Flanigan's, just past the Memorial Park with its 1929 Liberty in Distress statue. The bar appeared newish, and was so denuded of quirky posters, mementos or graffiti, no history, in short, that it almost felt like a basement rec room in a suburban home. There was a sticker on the cash register, "FREEDOM ISN'T FREE," but that was it. Four draft beers were available, Bud, Rolling Rock, Yuengling and Coors Light, and they were only \$2.50 a pint, so that's a good

sign, as I barely had any cash on me. Kenny Roger's "The Gambler" was on the juke box, to be followed by Cat Stevens, then the Doobie Brothers, so someone was really into wise, rueful white guys reflecting on this trying life. Eight dudes perched at the bar, with two speaking Spanish. Atlantic City is 30% Hispanic, and 15% Asian, so once outside the tourist area, you'll find a fair amount of Mexican, Dominican, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Vietnamese businesses. An old pizza joint, with "WELCOME TO ITALY" on its torn awning, now serves Mexican food primarily. There's a Sidney Pho, with an image of the Sidney Opera House on its sign, but Vietnamese do that. Walk into a Viet joint, and you may be greeted with a mural of the Eiffel Tower or even Florence, Italy, so why not Sidney? Why not have a Vietnamese eatery designed as a Bavarian beer hall? I wouldn't be surprised.

Through the plate glass window, I could see a couple walking by doggy style, with the young man fondling his girlfriend's boobs from behind. They were both laughing. On

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television, there was a fleeting news story on “the American Taliban,” which prompted a “We’ll blow you up, motherfucker!” from one of the drinkers.

Hearing pool balls clacking in an adjacent room, I eventually wandered over, and there, I met two super friendly dudes, Brian and Nestor. In his mid-thirties, Brian was born in Margate, just down the road, and he has lived on the Jersey Shore his entire life. With his long hair, scraggly beard, string head band, T-shirt of sunset over groovy surf, and plaid golf shorts, Brian looked more like a beach bum than what he was, an experienced union mason.

For a long time, there had been plenty of work in Atlantic City, but it became scarcer and scarcer, so three years ago, Brian had to commute each day to Philly, “At first, I’d take the train, but that meant getting up at 3:30 in the morning, so I could catch the 4:30, and once I got to Philly, I still had to take public transportation.” Like in many American cities, Philly’s train station is not quite downtown. “In the evening, I’d get home by 6:30, which meant I had no time for anything but to eat really fast, then sleep. You can’t do that day in and day out, it just wears you out, and my line of work is very physical. Some days, I was working 53 stories up. Outside! So I drove, but that meant 25 to 30 bucks a day for gas, plus 12 bucks for tolls, plus parking! So, shit, man, you’re talking 60 bucks a day easy. So after two years, I stopped working in Philly. I make do with what I can find here.”

Atlantic City is not just hurting from the economic depression affecting the entire country, every state save perhaps North Dakota, but it has also been squeezed by casinos sprouting up everywhere, not to mention online gambling. It has lost its monopoly, in short.

“There are still a lot of rich people in Jersey,” Brian said, “but they’re not spending as much. It’s like a barometer. When the going gets rough, they suck the money in.” Brian has found his equilibrium through vegetarianism, Buddhism and acrylic painting, “I

paint every day!”

“After you get home from the bar?”

“Yeah, after I get home from the bar!”

And with that, Brian was out of there, but not before he had introduced me to the bartender, Jenny, who turned out to be his aunt. Jenny had worked at Flanigan’s for 20 years, so this beer and whisky fountain had been there “forever,” though its age and character had been stripped away by a recent remodeling. With all the constant changes in Atlantic City, two decades is a very long time, and I would have loved to talk to Jenny, but she was too busy to chatter, so let’s meet Nestor.

Fifty-three-years old, Nestor is from Colombia, and came to the US 25 years ago with his mom and three siblings. For the last 23 years, he has been a busboy at Luke Palladino, in Harrah’s Casino. He also buses tables at the Diamond Club, and occasionally works construction. Luke Palladino, though, is his bread and butter, “The money there used to be so good. Fifteen years ago, I’d make \$200 a night, easy, just on tips, sometimes \$300. If there’s a birthday or a wedding anniversary, I’d make more just for singing. Some of the busboys were too embarrassed to sing, but I thought, Why not? I’ll sing! And they’d tip me really good, and on New Year’s Eve, I’d make \$1,200, even \$1,500!”

“Holy shit! You’re kidding me!”

“No, I’m not. There was so much money then, it was ridiculous. Some of these guys had money hanging out of their pockets, but not any more.”

Keep in mind that a busboy only gets 20% of the tips, so a waiter was really raking it in, and Nestor was briefly promoted to waiter, but that didn’t quite work out. Though his English vocabulary is extensive, and his grammar near perfect, his accent persists.

Like Brian, Nestor acknowledges that the good times are over, but, unlike most of us, he has a way out, “I’m going back to Colombia.”

“Wow! Like when? Soon?”

“Yes, I’m planning on going back within a year. It’s getting worse and worse here, and



"I paint every day!" said Brian. "After you get home from the bar?" "Yeah, after I get home from the bar!"

the lifestyle, it's too crazy. Why do you think everyone drinks so much, or takes so much drugs? There's so much stress here, and people are making less and less. My mother is already back in Colombia. She's 75, you know. A few years ago, we pooled our money together and bought some land, but my brothers and sister are all married, and they don't want to go back, but I will."

"If they're married, their kids are too Americanized.."

"Yes, so they will not go back, but I will."

"And what will you do there?"

"Be a farmer. I know how to do that. I grew up doing that."

"That's amazing, man! I don't even know how to grow tomatoes."

"You can always learn! Here," and he gave me his phone number, "You can call me whenever, in two months, in two years, and I'll help you to buy land in Colombia."

That last bit is something one would say in a bar, a beer-fueled sort of exuberance or sentimentality, but still, I appreciate Nestor throwing me a life line, not that I have the cash or credit to buy real estate anywhere.

In any case, the idea of leaping off this listing ship is gaining more traction all the time, with more Americans renouncing their citizenship than ever. For the rest of us, though, it would not be unwise to at least plot an escape route for when things get really nasty. For a while now, America has been the world's leading generator of refugees, so it's well practiced at terrifying or starving people into fleeing.

The decline of Atlantic City will not be reversed, and its casinos will be imploded or abandoned soon enough. Under the boardwalk, there won't be one but many blankets, quilts, tarps and pieces of cardboard, and on them, folks will even make love as they almost taste french fries and hot dogs. Through it all, though, there will always be the sea, that most beautiful sea to admire as if nothing has ever happened, or to splash into, never to return. **CT**

Linh Dinh is a Vietnamese-American poet, fiction writer, translator, and photographer.

He was a 1993 Pew Fellow.

<http://linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com>

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**I appreciate Nestor
 throwing me a life
 line, not that I have
 the cash or credit
 to buy real estate
 anywhere**

Send money!

Fred Reed takes a satirical peep inside the defence industry of the future

.....
A time-honored principle of governmental contraction is that if you are paid to solve a problem, the last thing you want is to succeed, because you then stop getting paid. This explains the anti-ballistic-missile program, racial policy, and Congress
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In early 2035, the thirty-fourth year of the war against Al Qaeda, the Pentagon issued a White Paper saying the F35 Raptor, the front-line fighter plane of the United States, was nearing the end of its useful life and needed to be replaced. Not everyone agreed. Various budget-cutting organizations argued that the Raptor had never been used and thus no one could tell whether it had a useful life. Anyway, the job of the Air Force, killing third-world peasants and their families, had been co-opted by drones. America didn't need a new fighter, said the critics.

The Air Force countered that the new plane would look feral and make loud, exciting noises. To this, critics could find no rejoinder. Design studies began. An early question was what to call the new fighter. By tradition, aircraft were named after aggressive but unintelligent birds (F-15 Eagle, F-16 Fighting Falcon), unpleasant animals (AH-1 Cobra, F-18 Hornet) ghosts (F-4 Phantom, AC-130 Spectre) or Stone Age nomads (AH-64 Apache). However, something with more pizzazz was needed to get funding through Congress.

Discussion ensued. Suggestions were solicited from The Building, as the Pentagon calls itself. These ran from "F-40 Screaming Kerblam" to the politically marginal "Horrendous Dyke," whose author believed that it would depress enemy fliers. Going with zoological tradition, the Air Force wanted to call it the Rabid Bat. A congressional wag weary

of military price tags suggested "Priscilla," because that no pilot would then go near it and the country would be spared the expense of wars. (His idea of painting it in floral patterns was not taken seriously.)

The Air Force prevailed. The Rabid Bat was born. Squabbling over specifications immediately began. Lockheed-Martin and Boeing Military Aircraft, both expected to bid, wanted a cruising speed of Mach 13, as this was technically impossible and would allow them to do lucrative design work until the entropic death of the solar system. A time-honored principle of governmental contraction is that if you are paid to solve a problem, the last thing you want is to succeed, because you then stop getting paid. This explains the anti-ballistic-missile program, racial policy, and Congress.

The matter of social consciousness arose. Half of fighter pilots were women, as prescribed by law in 2016. To facilitate gender equity, a bracket in the pilot's seat was mandated, to hold a telephone book for the flier to sit on so she could see out the windshield. Since many pilots were single moms, the design included a drop-down changing table in the cockpit.

These gender-friendly measures were championed by Dacowits, who is not a Polish mathematician but the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. These ladies subscribe to the principle that if a thing weighs more than twenty pounds, it ought to

be left on the damned truck.

All buttons and switches on the Rabid Bat were to be labeled in English, Spanish, Choctaw, and Tloxyproctyl. This latter was the language of an obscure tribe of seven primitives in the Amazon rain forest. Tloxyproctyl consisted of seven words, none of which meant anything. The tribe had been discovered when one of its members, named Wunxputl, had fallen into the Atlantic atop a log and washed up on Miami Beach. Thinking that an airliner he saw must be God, he enlisted in the Air Force. The EOST (Ethnic Outreach and Sensitivity Training) program had done the rest.

Secondary considerations were next addressed, such as speed, range, armament, and stealth. Critics again pointed out that none of these mattered, since Afghan weddings and lightly armed peasants could be blown up more cheaply with drones, which in any event were more agile than great honking piloted fighters. In fact Raytheon was working on wedding-recognition software, which went swimmingly and was only 1,700% over budget. A maverick in congress suggested that the Rabid Bats be lined up on a runway and used as planters for geraniums, but was not taken seriously.

Lockheed-Martin said that the price of the program would only be about \$987 billion, a steal. Historically-minded critics predicted that after the program was too far along to be abandoned, Lockheed-Martin would discover that the price would be...heh...rather more. This is a standard part of military contracting, with its own accounting category.

A prototype was duly built. Early flight trials began. It was then discovered by the investigative reporter Nickolas Fervently of the *New York Times* that due to a design error, the guns of the Rabid Bat pointed backward. A redesign, his sources had told him, would cost about \$345 billion.

A flap ensued. It sufficiently threatened the flow of funds that Lockheed's CEO, E. Johnston Farad, called a press conference. "It is necessary to understand the truly revolutionary nature of this aircraft," he said, "It is

so stealthy that the enemy will not detect the Rabid Bat until it has dropped its bomb load. Consequently it will only use its guns to fire backward at a pursuing enemy." Congress was so impressed by this advance that it increased the buy by forty aircraft.

Critics persisted in pointing out that the Rabid Bat was simply unnecessary. Muslim goat-herders were already being efficiently slaughtered by psychopaths sitting at screens in the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Lockheed responded that by pure happenstance, parts for the plane were to be manufactured in all fifty states, creating jobs. The plane was thus seen by all fifty governors to be essential to national security.

Reporter Fervently of the NYT looked suspiciously at the massive plant being built in West Virginia to make special tires for the plane. Production would be 431 tires per Rabid Bat per year. He wrote a column suggesting that the Rabid Bat would be the first combat eighteen-wheeler. He was dismissed as a crank. Surely, said Lockheed, it never hurt to have enough tires.

Conservative senators replied that Fervently obviously hated America and wanted it conquered and enslaved by enemies surrounding the country. Fervently pointed out that the United States was surrounded by Mexico, Canada, and two oceans. Mexico would not conquer America and thus disrupt its biggest drug market, and Canadians needed overflight rights to Cancun in winter. These considerations ensured amity.

The noted military scholar Damian Isby at the Rand Corporation circulated an eyes-only paper saying that the military irrelevance of the Rabid Bat was vital to the health of the defense industry and thus to national security. To the arms makers, he said, victory and defeat were equally odious, as both reduced the purchase of weaponry. A good war was an interminable war. The Rabid Bat, having no military purpose, would not upset the balance with the Taliban, and would thus keep America free.

Production began. The Republic was safe. **CT**

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Fred Reed has worked for Army Times, The Washingtonian, Soldier of Fortune, Federal Computer Week, and The Washington Times... His web site is www.fredon everything.net

The stock market is a racket

Andrew S. Fischer has been there and has dire warnings for the unwary

.....
You can always hold onto a poorly-performing stock as long as you wish (or until the company goes bust) and hope that its fortunes will change. This is the only real advantage over the roulette wheel
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After a decade of working for an investment advisor, I can safely state that most of what passes for “investing” is nothing but speculation. Buying stocks is nothing but casino gambling with a longer time-frame. Most “investors” are playing roulette and their hunches just as much as every vacationer with chips in Las Vegas, but the outcome of a so-called “investment” will be determined at a later date, usually on the investor’s terms.

Buying existing shares of stock comprises the vast majority of the average person’s “investment” purchases... but is that really investing? In a word: no. It is pure speculation, because there is no new net investment. Nothing occurs but a transfer of (electronic) stock certificates from one person to another. The company whose stock is being bought and sold gets no new capital. Of course, the broker and other assorted intermediaries receive service fees (and care little what happens to the stock’s price in the future), but what has really transpired is that the seller and buyer will either turn out to be a genius or a dope. One genius, one dope.

If the stock price drops after the seller unloads the stock, he is the genius and the buyer is the dope. If the price rises, the seller is the dope and the buyer is the genius (assuming the latter can now find someone

else to buy the stock). Either way, what has transpired is merely a transfer of wealth from one person to another. There has been a winner and a loser in equal measure. A stock has been traded; no net wealth has been created.

Stock trades are nothing but guesswork. The buyer hopes the stock price will rise. The seller believes the stock price will not rise; therefore he sells. The trades are based on various forms of analysis, which boil down to attempts to outsmart the market. Some methods and some advisors do better than others, so there may be something to that. Nonetheless, all (non-IPO) stock transactions produce no net wealth and are akin to casino gambling. Of course, you can always hold onto a poorly-performing stock as long as you wish (or until the company goes bust) and hope that its fortunes will change. This is the only real advantage over the roulette wheel.

Now, if you’re buying newly issued stock, then I would say that indeed qualifies as an investment. The issuing company is trying to raise capital, you buy some shares and now you’re a part-owner of that company. Of course, your voting power will be miniscule compared to that of the “real” owners of the company: the entrepreneurs who issued themselves many thousands (or millions) of shares at no cost or low cost before offering shares to the general public. Now I’m

not saying that there isn't a system in place which will examine an IPO and attempt to determine a stock's value. Nor am I saying that the marketplace won't scrutinize that IPO and bid the shares up or down, and this is all well and good. (Just revisit Facebook's IPO; the market quickly smacked its share price down to what it believed was valid.)

What I am saying is that insiders' ability to issue themselves millions of shares at essentially no cost while they sell other millions of shares to would-be investors at significant cost smells like a racket. As Alphonse Capone famously observed: "those stock market guys are crooked." Depending on the "next-big-thing" cachet of the stock, it could rise dramatically due to market madness alone. Later, especially if the company performs well, the "real" owners of the company will sell their no-cost shares of stock on the open market and rake in fortunes. Perhaps non-insider purchasers of the IPO shares will make money selling their shares, as well. Not nearly as much as the insider owners, but if the IPO-purchasers' capital allowed the company to make and sell its products profitably, then it's sensible that their investment has made them a profit.

Or is it? Does it make sense that because a company has increased its assets, increased its sales and has doubled in size it's automatically worth more, and therefore its stock price should rise? If it pays a dividend, I would think so. If a company makes a bottom line profit of say, \$100 million, and pays most of it out in shareholder dividends, and I paid \$10 for one share of the stock and get \$1 back a year, that seems pretty good. That's a 10 percent annual dividend. Darn, I should've bought a lot more shares! But what if the company pays no dividends, and just plows its money back into research and development? What if it never pays a dividend? What good is such a stock? The standard reply would be that since the company's assets and its earnings potential have increased dramatically, so has its worth and

thus its stock price. You can sell the share for which you paid \$10 a year ago for \$15 today! That's a 50 percent gain in only a year! Once again – darn, I should've bought a lot more shares! But does this really make sense?

Suppose I own the world's last tomato; it's a nice tomato, and I've kept it in a vacuum-sealed glass case and no more will ever be produced. There is a huge demand for my tomato, since it is much rarer than a Da Vinci painting. Then something strange happens. Incredibly, my tomato doubles in size overnight! Now it's worth twice as much as before! Or is it? Hmm... maybe not. Maybe the last tomato on Earth is worth just the same as the night before... and maybe no-dividend Google stock is really worth no more today than it was ten years ago. Think about it....

Bankster elitists

Okay, in case you missed the title of this essay... the stock market is a racket. It exists to serve the interests of Wall Street and the bankster elitists who, along with their cronies in the federal government, run our country and our lives. Astute readers and web-surfers will already understand this from the writings of genuine economists and other wise observers. As proof, let's recall the 2008 financial crisis. I can still see the contemptible Hank Paulson, shouting and sneering his doomsday message that "unless we create and hand out money to my pals" (who almost destroyed the world's financial system) Armageddon would surely follow. The way he bullied our spineless Congress made me want to throw up. As prescient pundit Gerald Celente has noted, the words "too big to fail" ended any doubt that the USA has turned to fascism.

While I'm only an amateur economist, I do claim a relevant perspective on the stock market, having worked at an investment advisory firm for over ten years, as noted above. To my knowledge, this firm was

Does it make sense that because a company has increased its assets, increased its sales and has doubled in size it's automatically worth more, and therefore its stock price should rise?

BUYER BEWARE

With the newfound ease of buying and selling shares, undoubtedly some clever individuals realized that money was to be made by merely buying shares at a low cost and selling them at a high price

completely honest and above board in every respect, and went to significant pains to comply with the SEC's every edict, no matter how ridiculous and time-consuming. Having participated tangentially in three or four SEC audits, the only issues their drones could come up with were essentially minor clerical and statistical errors. Despite this, management practically lived in terror that the SEC might uncover some horrible shortcoming in our procedures, and shut us down overnight. (To prevent this, a full-time compliance manager was hired unnecessarily, and this eventually led to my unwilling departure from the company. But that is a story for another day....)

Onward, to stock exchanges. These enterprises began as many do, sprouting from a good idea which would bring people together in the free market. But, as often happens with good ideas, these exchanges soon became perversions of their initial designs. In this case, they became vehicles for speculation instead of providing a reasonably helpful investment-related service.

According to Wikipedia, the origins of stock shares may date back to ancient Rome, and partnership agreements using shares date back to the 13th century. Then came the oceangoing Hanseatic League, innovative maritime British merchants, and the Dutch East India Company in 1602, which was "formed as a joint-stock company based in six locations with shares that were readily tradable." Investopedia suggests that various multiple investors were involved in one discrete trading voyage after another, until the Dutch East India Company rewarded fortunate investors with "dividends on all the proceeds from all the voyages" its companies undertook. The website further notes that British shareholders wishing to trade shares would conduct their affairs at "various coffee shops around London."

To my way of thinking, all of this is fine and dandy. Investors bought shares in individual seagoing opportunities or in a company which paid dividends on all its voy-

ages. For one reason or another, some of these investors needed money for other endeavors, and met with business associates or acquaintances in an effort to sell their stock shares and raise that cash. Since there were no stock exchanges at the time, they met in coffee houses. If the shares were in a company that was doing well, then they might be likely to sell for more than their original cost. By way of example, say an investor in the Dutch East India Company paid 1,000 British pounds (or 1,000 florins, whatever) for a share, and he had been getting an average return of 300 a year for the last five years – a pretty good return! Unfortunately, he needs 1,500 right now (say, to offer as a dowry) and can't wait another five years. I think it's a good bet that he'd have been able to sell his share for that amount. In any case, the intent of the original purchaser clearly was to invest in an income-producing enterprise and receive periodic payments (dividends) from his investment. Circumstances or time-preference forced him to sell his investment for immediate cash.

The above is a centuries-old tale of investing. What has happened since?

Surely some sharp entrepreneurs opened their own little stock exchange storefronts over the years, but in 1773 the London Stock Exchange opened its doors, and in 1792 so did the New York Stock Exchange. With the newfound ease of buying and selling shares, undoubtedly some clever individuals realized that money was to be made by merely buying shares at a low cost and selling them at a high price. Further, stock prices might be manipulated through rumor, innuendo, collusion and other means. Thus, the age of speculation was born.

In his 2011 book *Griftopia*, Matt Taibbi notes that in 2008 "speculation grew to more than 80 percent of the activity on the commodity exchanges" according to a Congressional staffer. Corroboration of this can be found thirty-four years earlier in the 1974 comment of an unspecified Congressman in

a law review article (footnote 9 on page 62), who proffers that “speculation is the heart of the market and provides from 60 percent to 80 percent of the liquidity for futures transactions.”

Taibbi’s position, and that of many economists, is that speculation provides liquidity in markets. However, in Taibbi’s view, when speculative activity reaches 80 percent of the total activity in those markets it becomes counter-productive, and benefits only Wall Street. He may be right, and I’ve already argued above that mere trading creates no wealth. It may serve a purpose in that both buyers and sellers are happier after mutually agreed-upon transactions, but nothing has been created; certainly no new wealth has been created. They might as well be trading baseball cards or coprolites.

Turning away from the commodities market and returning to the stock market, I have been unable to determine what percentage of trades are speculative. However, a strong indicator might be the level of margin trading. In essence, when people use margin they are borrowing money to buy stocks. A recently posted chart from kimblechartingsolutions.com shows that margin use is currently at an extremely high level, a historically dangerous situation. This contributed to the 1929 stock market crash and Great Depression, as well as the bursting bubbles since the year 2000 – excessive speculation due to too much money and credit in circulation (thanks to the clueless clods at the Federal Reserve). In my opinion, the chances are good that history will soon repeat itself.

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Increase in speculation

The advent of electronic and online trading has significantly increased speculative trading. Forty years ago, investors had to call brokers to buy and sell stocks. Sources of information and knowledge were limited. It all seemed daunting to most individual investors, almost an arcane art, and it was

a slow process. Today, who knows how many people watch their stocks rise and fall throughout the day, accessing E-Trade or TD Ameritrade, buying and selling shares on impulse? As far as institutions go, they can buy or sell hundreds of thousands of shares in an instant and affect share prices a moment later, while Goldman Sachs and its ilk use computer algorithms to sneak in their trades a micro-second ahead of everyone else. All of this is pure speculation, of course, and worse, it’s momentum-driven. The only proof required is to observe the effect of any major news item on TV, to watch the immediate rise or fall of the DJIA, as big Wall Street players attempt to scoop up or dump stocks, making their moves ahead of the rest of us, before prices really rise or fall....

Let’s get a little personal now. Let’s say you start your own business. Why? Because you need income, of course. You’ve got a little nest egg, but no job, and hardly enough money to last for thirty years. Your plan is to take a chunk of your savings and open, say, a pizza shop. You believe you can take home around \$1,000 a week after expenses, for an annual income of approximately \$50,000 a year. Sounds reasonable. So you find a location, lease space, buy equipment and hire employees. Paulson’s Peppery Pizza (PPP) is born, and pretty soon it actually becomes successful.

After a few years, you find that your store has performed better than expected. You get a “big idea” – why not open ten duplicate pizza shops and therefore take home \$500,000 per year? But you don’t have enough savings to initiate your plan. What can you do? Well, you could borrow the money. Alternatively, you could take on silent partners, or issue stock to investors.

You don’t like borrowing, hate the idea of having partners, so you decide to issue stock. But why would a putative investor hand over good money for a spiffy-looking piece of paper? The answer: he expects dividends. He expects your business to have bottom line

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Margin use is currently at an extremely high level, a historically dangerous situation. This contributed to the 1929 stock market crash and Great Depression, as well as the bursting bubbles since the year 2000

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BUYER BEWARE

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Why would anyone want to buy IPO stock shares if they won't be paying dividends for years? Why would anyone want to buy stock in a company without a payback?
.....

profits of 500K a year. He anticipates buying your stock for \$1,000,000 and expects you to take an annual salary of, say, 300K and he expects to get a quasi-salary in the form of a dividend, say 200K annually (20 percent on his investment). Eventually the deal is struck, you find a single investor who buys one share of stock from you for a million dollars, and you issue yourself two voting shares so you retain control of the company.

A few years later, everything is running smoothly. You and your investor have been talking, and decide to take your little regional company national – and public. Your investor “knows people,” and pretty soon you have an Initial Public Offering (IPO) in the works. The two of you will offer 10 million shares of common stock at \$10 (\$100,000,000 total offering) to the public at large, and give yourselves 5 million shares apiece at no cost.

Since your company has done great so far, the IPO goes well, despite the fact that purchasers of your shares understand that they probably won't get any dividends for several years. There are 20 million shares of PPP in existence worth \$100 million. You and your investor, together, own half of them, which are worth \$50 million. Your investor makes you a great offer: he'll pay you \$25 million for your shares and you can retire at a young age. What the heck, you do the deal and move to Pago Pago.

In simplified form, the above is exactly how some people get very rich. Many entrepreneurs actually begin with the idea of starting a business to sell out at some point in time. There is nothing wrong with this – open a business, build it up, and sell it to someone (or some group) with lots of idle money who would dearly love to earn 20 percent annually on some of that money. Easier said than done, of course.

As it happens, after an IPO many owners (stockholders) of a business are often individual, middle-class shareholders. So how do things work out for them?

Well, on the day of the IPO, most buyers

will be institutions and important clients of the broker who handles the IPO. They have been assured by the broker that the company in question has great prospects. (During periods of IPO madness, this assurance isn't even necessary.) These investors will get their stock shares at or near the IPO offering price. The “average Joe,” at the back of the line, will ordinarily pay more for his shares. In any case, buying shares in an IPO is certainly an investment. Buyers assess the prospects of a company and trade cash (in the present) for a slice of ownership in the company, in anticipation of being financially rewarded (in the future). The company uses the money to expand and improve its business. But why would anyone want to buy IPO stock shares if they won't be paying dividends for years? Why would anyone want to buy stock in a company without a payback? One answer is that investors hope the company will pay nice dividends down the road. Another answer is that they hope the company will increase in size.

Let's return to Paulson's Peppery Pizza. Investors bought its IPO shares in the belief that PPP would use its newfound cash to expand from a regional into a national chain of restaurants, thereby vastly increasing the company's size.

Hopefully, PPP's net assets and annual bottom-line income would increase over the years by, say, a factor of 10. Therefore, assuming someone or some group wanted to buy the whole company, the IPO stock shares might be worth around 10 times the price paid at the IPO (\$10), and could be sold for \$100 – a nice gain.

It's clear that buying IPO shares can be considered actual investing. However, when existing stock is traded after an IPO, that is clearly not investing – rather, it is pure speculation. Why? Because sellers feel that a company will not grow and its stock will be worth less in the future. Because buyers are forecasting the exact opposite. Both groups believe their analysis of a given company is the correct one, so they trade. However,

no new investment has been created. Cash changes hands between buyers and sellers of a company's stock shares, but the company itself gets no cash. This is simply not investing. It is a form of gambling, akin to a roulette wheel without a 0 or 00. The only difference is that the shareholder decides when the wheel stops. He chooses to sell with a gain or with a loss.

Moreover, one faction will guess correctly and win, while the other faction will lose. If a stock goes up in price after a new buyer purchases it he'll be the winner, and the seller will be the loser. If a stock goes down in price the seller will be the winner and the buyer will be the loser. This is the unseen delusion of the middle-class investor, who merely trades stocks, speculating while thinking he's investing. Those of us who participate are suckers, outsmarted and outgunned by the big boys at every turn, and we need to understand that. Unfortunately, with interest rates currently manipulated by the national government to all-time lows, for most of us it's the only game in town.

Due to the Federal Reserve's never-ending increase of the money supply, the overall market trend is biased upward, so buyers tend to be winners (or at least keep pace with inflation) in the long run, barring a market collapse. When there is a collapse, you could save a ton of money by bailing out in its early stages and reentering the market later, of course, but most "experts" will just tell you to stay in the market for the "long haul," and advisors generally care only that they're doing better than the indices they show you for comparison purposes. (Dear Client: while the DJIA fell 55% last week, you only lost 50%. What a great job we're doing!) Okay, maybe five years after a market crash you'll be back where you started. Maybe the market's ups and downs are just part of the process. Not so terrible.... Or maybe instead there's a big problem for the little guy, namely: how much will your investments be worth when you need to

start cashing them in to meet your living expenses – when you need to stop the roulette wheel?

Brokers and advisors make more money during boom periods, so they encourage a general market uptrend any way they can. Elite (government-connected) banksters and crooked Wall Street firms (Goldman Sachs, et al) can and do manipulate markets, at least in my opinion. Furthermore, they're in cahoots with the national government and virtually immune to significant losses due to bad decisions. In the land of crony capitalism, they're considered too big to fail or jail, and then they get bailed out as needed, without having to worry about those nasty downside risks.

Brokers and advisors get fees, even if they guess wrong and you lose money. Investment advisors typically charge ½ to 1% annually, based not on performance, but on assets under management. So, if a firm is managing a billion dollars of client assets, it'll gross 5 to 10 million, most of which goes to salaries and benefits for 10 to 20 people. Not bad. Of course, amassing such a client base isn't easy, and underperforming firms will go out of business eventually. But shouldn't an advisor make money for its clients in a bear market as well as a bull market – or at least not lose money? Unfortunately the vast majority don't. Whether in bear or bull times, many brokers, advisors and mutual fund managers do worse than unmanaged index funds, so what good are they? When they do perform well, a huge chunk of their success is simply due to the "rising tide lifts all boats" effect. And don't forget... they create no wealth; they merely move it around.

Put it all together: trading, brokers, advisors, fees, insiders, Wall Street, banksters, the Fed. It spells r-a-c-k-e-t. **CT**

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Andrew S. Fischer is the author of two novels and "Pugastories: Between Heaven and Hell", a collection of short stories which is available at Amazon.com

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Those of us who participate in the stock market are suckers, outsmarted and outgunned by the big boys at every turn, and we need to understand that

Diet Coke fights obesity? Fat chance!

Katherine Paul & Ronnie Cummins on a ‘ludicrous’ marketing campaign

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Aspartame, far from being a “healthy alternative” to sugar or anything else, has for years been the focus of studies declaring it unequivocally unhealthy, and suggesting that it has no place in our food supply
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It was laughable when Coca-Cola launched a campaign to fight obesity. And even more laughable when the king of soda’s anti-obesity campaign shifted all the blame for those extra pounds to lack of exercise and chairs (yes, chairs).

But now, the company that donated \$1.7 million to defeat last year’s GMO labeling initiative in California has gone from laughable to dangerous. In the wake of declining sales of its Diet Coke brand, Coke has rolled out an ad campaign carefully and deceptively crafted to convince consumers that aspartame, the artificial sweetener (whose patent was at one time owned by Monsanto) in Diet Coke, is a “healthy alternative” to sugar.

The new campaign, being tested in the Atlanta and Chicago markets, takes the form of full-page advertisements disguised as public service announcements. The message? Don’t believe all that bad stuff you’ve heard about aspartame.

Aspartame is perfectly safe. It’s better for you than sugar. Drinking Diet Coke will help you stay thin and healthy.

It’s a sweet story, concocted by the marketing wizards at Coke who are desperate to keep the diet soda money train rolling. But it’s not true. Multiple studies, including one published in 2010 by the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* have concluded just the opposite. Aspartame, they say, ac-

tually contributes to weight gain by stimulating your appetite. Other studies have revealed that aspartame increases carbohydrate cravings and stimulates fat storage and weight gain.

The link between aspartame and increased weight gain is old news. So is the fact that aspartame, far from being a “healthy alternative” to sugar or anything else, has for years been the focus of studies declaring it unequivocally unhealthy, and suggesting that it has no place in our food supply.

Aspartame has been linked to brain cancer and to the accumulation of formaldehyde, known to cause gradual damage to the nervous system, the immune system and to cause irreversible genetic damage at long-term, low-level exposure.

In 1995, the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) documented 92 aspartame-related symptoms, including migraines, memory loss, seizures, obesity, infertility, dizziness, change in seizures, fatigue, neurological problems and a host of others.

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It’s not food

Aspartame is not food. It’s defined as a synthetic compound of two amino acids (l-aspartyl-l-phenylalanine o-methyl ester). The compound was discovered accidentally in 1965, by James M. Schlatter, a chem-

ist at G.D. Searle Company. Schlatter was testing an anti-ulcer drug. When he licked his finger and discovered that his concoction tasted sweet, the market for artificial sweeteners was born.

Is aspartame safe? Not according to multiple studies conducted over decades. And, at one time, not according to the FDA. In 1975, the FDA put a hold on aspartame's approval, citing deficiencies in the studies conducted by Searle and its contractors. An analysis of 164 studies of aspartame's potential impact on human safety found that of the 90 non-industry-sponsored studies, 83 identified one or more problems with aspartame. Of the 74 industry-sponsored studies, all 74 claimed that aspartame was safe.

So how did aspartame get into our food supply? We have Donald Rumsfeld, former US Secretary of Defense to thank. In 1981, Rumsfeld, who had previously served as CEO of Searle, hand-picked Reagan's new FDA commissioner, Arthur Hayes Hull Jr. It was Hull who ultimately gave aspartame the green light.

Here's how it went down. On January 21, 1981, the day after Ronald Reagan's inauguration, Searle re-applied to the FDA for approval to use aspartame as a sweetener in beverages.

Sixth member

Hull, the brand new FDA commissioner, recommended by Rumsfeld, appointed a five-person Scientific Commission to review the board of inquiry's prior decision. (A board of inquiry had been formed in 1975 when the FDA first questioned the validity of Searle's studies on aspartame). When it became clear that the Scientific Commission was on track to uphold the 1975 ban by a 3-2 decision, Hull installed a sixth member on the commission. That led to a deadlocked vote. Hull then personally cast the tie-breaking vote. Voila. Aspartame was approved.

Hull soon left the FDA and eventually landed at Burston-Marsteller, the PR firm for Searle and for years, Monsanto. In 1985, Monsanto bought Searle and later spun off the company under the name NutraSweet. But not before Rumsfeld earned a handsome \$12-million bonus, presumably for his role in greasing the wheels for aspartame's approval.

In an article published earlier this year in the *New York Times*, entitled "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food," Michael Moss exposed the junk food industry for employing chemists to concoct additives intended to hook people on the very food that is making us, including our children, not only obese, but chronically ill.

When one of the leading Junk Food Giants says it wants to help fight obesity by selling you more Diet Coke, nothing could be further from the truth. But when it takes that campaign a step farther, by paying newspapers to run full-page ads disguised as scientific articles, that's deceptive advertising at its worst.

We should be celebrating a 3-percent decline in sales of Diet Coke. And we should be boycotting any product that contains aspartame, a synthetic chemical compound linked to a host of health issues, including obesity, and brought to market under the shadow of dirty politics.

Coke is "testing" its new ad campaign in Chicago and Atlanta. Let's tell Coca-Cola's CEO, Muhtar Kent, and other executives at Coke, that we don't appreciate their new ad campaign, and we'd like them to pull it immediately. Ads intended to pass for "scientific articles" are an insult to our intelligence and a threat to the health of consumers.

CT

Katherine Paul is Director of Communications for the Organic Consumers Association. Ronnie Cummins is the association's National Director
<http://organicconsumers.org>

When one of the leading Junk Food Giants says it wants to help fight obesity by selling you more Diet Coke, nothing could be further from the truth

Found at last!

After searching for 10 years, the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction have finally been found – in Syria! writes **William Blum**

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We don't even know for sure that there was a real chemical attack. Where does that accusation come from? The United States? The al-Qaeda rebels?
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Secretary of State John Kerry: “There is no doubt that Saddam al-Assad has crossed the red line. ... Sorry, did I just say ‘Saddam?’”

A US drone has just taken a photo of Mulah Omar riding on a motorcycle through the streets of Damascus.

So what do we have as the United States refuses to rule out an attack on Syria and keeps five warships loaded with missiles in the eastern Mediterranean?

- Only 9 percent of Americans support a US military intervention in Syria.
- Only 11% of the British supported a UK military intervention; this increased to 25% after the announcement of the alleged chemical attack.
- British Prime Minister David Cameron lost a parliamentary vote August 29 endorsing military action against Syria 285-272
- 64% of the French people oppose an intervention by the French Army. “Before acting we need proof,” said a French government spokesperson.
- Former and current high-ranking US military officers question the use of military force as a punitive measure and suggest that the White House lacks a coherent strategy. “If the administration is ambivalent about the wisdom of defeating or crippling the Syrian leader, possibly setting the stage for Damascus to fall to Islamic fundamentalist rebels, they say, the military ob-

jective of strikes on Assad’s military targets is at best ambiguous.”

- President Obama has no United Nations approval for intervention. (In February a massive bombing attack in Damascus left 100 dead and 250 wounded; in all likelihood the work of Islamic terrorists. The United States blocked a Russian resolution condemning the attack from moving through the UN Security Council)
- None of NATO’s 28 members has proposed an alliance with the United States in an attack against Syria. NATO’s Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said that he saw “no NATO role in an international reaction to the [Syrian] regime.”
- The Arab League has not publicly endorsed support of US military action in Syria; nor have key regional players Saudi Arabia and Qatar, concerned about a possible public backlash from open support for US intervention.
- We don’t even know for sure that there was a real chemical attack. Where does that accusation come from? The United States? The al-Qaeda rebels? Or if there was such an attack, where is the evidence that the Syrian government was the perpetrator? The Assad regime has accused the rebels of the act, releasing a video showing a cave with alleged chemical-weapon equipment as well as claiming to have captured rebels possessing sarin gas. Whoever dispensed

the poison gas – why, in this age of ubiquitous cameras, are there no photos of anyone wearing a gas mask? The UN inspection team was originally dispatched to Syria to investigate allegations of earlier chemical weapons use: two allegations made by the rebels and one by the government.

- The United States insists that Syria refused to allow the UN investigators access to the site of the attack. However, the UN request was made Saturday, August 24; the Syrian government agreed the next day.

- In rejecting allegations that Syria deployed poison gas, Russian officials have argued that the rebels had a clear motivation: to spur a Western-led attack on Syrian forces; while Assad had every reason to avoid any action that could spur international intervention at a time when his forces were winning the war and the rebels are increasingly losing world support because of their uncivilized and ultra-cruel behavior.

- President George W. Bush misled the world on Iraq’s WMD, but Bush’s bogus case for war at least had details that could be checked, unlike what the Obama administration released August 29 on Syria’s alleged chemical attacks – no direct quotes, no photographic evidence, no named sources, nothing but “trust us,” points out Robert Parry, intrepid Washington journalist.

So, in light of all of the above, the path for Mr. Obama to take – as a rational, humane being – is of course clear. Is it not? N’est-ce pas? Nicht wahr? – Bombs Away!

Pretty discouraging it is. No, I actually find much to be rather encouraging. So many people seem to have really learned something from the Iraqi pile of lies and horror and from decades of other American interventions. Skepticism – good ol’ healthy skepticism – amongst the American, British and French people. It was stirring to watch the British Parliament in a debate of the kind rarely, if ever, seen in the 21st-century US Congress. And American military officers asking some of the right questions.

The Arab League not supporting a US attack, surprising for an organization not enamored of the secular Syrian government. And NATO – even NATO! – refusing so far to blindly fall in line with the White House. When did that last happen? I thought it was against international law.

Secretary of State John Kerry said that if the United States did not respond to the use of chemical weapons the country would become an international “laughing-stock”. Yes, that’s really what America and its people have to worry about – not that their country is viewed as a lawless, mass-murdering repeat offender. Other American officials have expressed concern that a lack of a US response might incite threats from Iran and North Korea.

Now that is indeed something to laugh at. It’s comforting to think that the world might be finally losing the stars in their eyes about US foreign policy partly because of countless ridiculous remarks such as these.

United States bombings, which can be just as indiscriminate and cruel as poison gas. (A terrorist is someone who has a bomb but doesn’t have an air force.)

The glorious bombing list of our glorious country, which our glorious schools don’t teach, our glorious media don’t remember, and our glorious leaders glorify.

- Korea and China 1950-53 (Korean War)
- Guatemala 1954
- Indonesia 1958
- Cuba 1959-1961
- Guatemala 1960
- Congo 1964
- Laos 1964-73
- Vietnam 1961-73
- Cambodia 1969-70
- Guatemala 1967-69
- Grenada 1983
- Lebanon 1983, 1984 (both Lebanese and Syrian targets)
- Libya 1986
- El Salvador 1980s
- Nicaragua 1980s

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It was stirring to watch the British Parliament in a debate of the kind rarely, if ever, seen in the 21st-century US Congress. And American military officers asking some of the right questions

In 1988, the last year of the 8-year Iraq-Iran War, America’s military and intelligence communities knew about and did nothing to stop a series of nerve gas attacks by Iraq far more devastating than anything Syria has seen

- Iran 1987
- Panama 1989
- Iraq 1991 (Persian Gulf War)
- Kuwait 1991
- Somalia 1993
- Bosnia 1994, 1995
- Sudan 1998
- Afghanistan 1998
- Yugoslavia 1999
- Yemen 2002
- Iraq 1991-2003 (US/UK on regular no-fly-zone basis)
- Iraq 2003-2011 (Second Gulf War)
- Afghanistan 2001 to present
- Pakistan 2007 to present
- Somalia 2007-8, 2011 to present
- Yemen 2009, 2011 to present
- Libya 2011
- Syria 2013?

The above list doesn’t include the repeated use by the United States of depleted uranium, cluster bombs, white phosphorous, and other charming inventions of the Pentagon mad scientists; also not included: chemical and biological weapons abroad, chemical and biological weapons in the United States (sic), and encouraging the use of chemical and biological weapons by other nations; all these lists can be found in my book *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*.

A story just released by *Foreign Policy* magazine, based on newly-discovered classified documents, reports how, in 1988, the last year of the 8-year Iraq-Iran War, America’s military and intelligence communities knew about and did nothing to stop a series of nerve gas attacks by Iraq far more devastating than anything Syria has seen. Indeed, during that war the United States was the primary supplier to Iraq of the chemicals and hardware necessary to provide the Saddam Hussein regime with a chemical-warfare capability.

Now, apparently, the United States has discovered how horrible chemical warfare is, even if only of the “alleged” variety.

Humanitarian intervention

Some of those currently advocating bombing Syria turn for justification to their old faithful friend “humanitarian intervention”, one of the earliest examples of which was the 1999 US and NATO bombing campaign to stop ethnic cleansing and drive Serbian forces from Kosovo. However, a collective amnesia appears to have afflicted countless intelligent, well-meaning people, who are convinced that the US/NATO bombing took place after the mass forced deportation of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo was well underway; which is to say that the bombing was launched to stop this “ethnic cleansing”. In actuality, the systematic forced deportations of large numbers of people from Kosovo did not begin until a few days after the bombing began, and was clearly a Serbian reaction to it, born of extreme anger and powerlessness. This is easily verified by looking at a daily newspaper for the few days before the bombing began the night of March 23/24, and the few days after. Or simply look at the *New York Times* of March 26, page 1, which reads:

... with the NATO bombing already begun, a deepening sense of fear took hold in Pristina [the main city of Kosovo] that the Serbs would NOW vent their rage against ethnic Albanian civilians in retaliation.

On March 27, we find the first reference to a “forced march” or anything of that sort.

But the propaganda version is already set in marble.

If you see something, say something. Unless it’s US war crimes.

“When you sign a security clearance and swear oaths, you actually have to abide by that. It is not optional.” – Steven Bucci, of the neo-conservative Heritage Foundation, speaking of Chelsea Manning (formerly known as Bradley)

Really? No matter what an individual

with security clearance is asked to do? No matter what he sees and knows of, he still has to ignore his conscience and follow orders? But Steven, my lad, you must know that following World War II many Germans of course used “following orders” as an excuse. The victorious Allies of course executed many of them.

Their death sentences were laid down by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, Germany, which declared that “Individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience. Therefore individual citizens have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity from occurring.”

Nuremberg Principle IV moreover states: “The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his Government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him.”

Manning, and Edward Snowden as well, did have moral choices, and they chose them.

It should be noted that Barack Obama has refused to prosecute those under the Bush administration involved in torture specifically – he declares – because they were following orders. Has this “educated” man never heard of the Nuremberg Tribunal? Why isn’t he embarrassed to make this argument again and again?

I imagine that in the past three years that Manning has had to live with solitary confinement, torture and humiliation, adding mightily to her already existing personal difficulties, the thought of suicide has crossed her mind on a number of occasions. It certainly would have with me if I had been in her position. In the coming thousands and thousands of days and long nights of incarceration such thoughts may be Manning’s frequent companion. If the thoughts become desire, and the desire becomes unbearable, I hope the brave young woman can find a way to carry it out. Every

person has that right, including heroes.

The United States and its European poodles may have gone too far for their own good in their attempts to control all dissenting communication – demanding total information from companies engaged in encrypted messaging, forcing the closure of several such firms, obliging the plane carrying the Bolivian president to land, smashing the computers at a leading newspaper, holding a whistle-blowing journalist’s partner in custody for nine hours at an airport, seizing the phone records of Associated Press journalists, threatening to send a *New York Times* reporter to jail if he doesn’t disclose the source of a leak, shameless lying at high levels, bugging the European Union and the United Nations, surveillance without known limits ... Where will it end? Will it backfire at some point and allow America to return to its normal level of police state? On July 24, a bill that would have curtailed the power of the NSA was only narrowly defeated by 217 to 205 votes in the US House of Representatives.

And how long will Amnesty International continue to tarnish its image by refusing to state the obvious? That Chelsea Manning is a Prisoner of Conscience. If you go to Amnesty’s website and search “prisoner of conscience” you’ll find many names given, including several Cubans prominently featured. Can there be any connection to Manning’s omission with the fact that the executive director of Amnesty International USA, Suzanne Nossel, came to her position from the US Department of State, where she served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Organizations?

A phone call to Amnesty’s office in New York was unable to provide me with any explanation for Manning’s omission. I suggest that those of you living in the UK try the AI headquarters in London.

Meanwhile, at the other pre-eminent international human rights organization, Human Rights Watch, Tom Malinowski, the director of HRW’s Washington office, has

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We've long been told that NATO expansion and its missiles in Europe have nothing to do with Russia. And Russia has been told the same, much to Moscow's continuous skepticism
.....

been nominated by Obama to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Is it really expecting too much that a high official of a human rights organization should not go to work for a government that has been the world's leading violator of human rights for more than half a century? And if that designation is too much for you to swallow just consider torture, the worst example of mankind's inhumanity to man. What government has been intimately involved with that horror more than the United States? Teaching it, supplying the manuals, supplying the equipment, creation of torture centers in much of the world, kidnaping people to these places ("rendition"), solitary confinement, forced feeding, Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Chicago ... Lord forgive us!

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Surrounding Russia

One of the reactions of the United States to Russia granting asylum to Edward Snowden was reported thus: "There was a blistering response on Capitol Hill and calls for retaliatory measures certain to infuriate the Kremlin.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), long one of the Senate's leading critics of Moscow, blasted the asylum decision as 'a slap in the face of all Americans' and called on the administration to turn up the pressure on Moscow on a variety of fronts, including a renewed push for NATO expansion and new missile-defense programs in Europe."

But we've long been told that NATO expansion and its missiles in Europe have nothing to do with Russia. And Russia has been told the same, much to Moscow's continuous skepticism. "Look," said Russian president Vladimir Putin about NATO in 2001, "this is a military organization. It's moving towards our border. Why?" He subsequently described NATO as "the stinking corpse of the cold war."

We've been told repeatedly by the US government that the missiles are for protection against an Iranian attack. Is it (choke) possible that the Bush and Obama administrations have been (gasp) lying to us?

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America's love affair with Guns

Adam Kokesh is a veteran of the war in Iraq who lives in the Washington, DC area. He's one of the countless Americans who's big on guns, guns that will be needed to protect Americans from their oppressive government, guns that will be needed for "the revolution".

On July 4 the 31-year-old Kokesh had a video made of himself holding a shotgun and loading shells into it while speaking into the camera as he stood in Freedom Plaza, a federal plot of land in between the Washington Monument and the Capitol. This led to a police raid of his home and his being arrested on the 25th for carrying a firearm outside his home or office. The 23-second video can be seen on YouTube.
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I sent Kokesh the following email:

"Adam: All your weapons apparently didn't help you at all when the police raided your house. But supposedly, people like you advocate an armed populace to protect the public from an oppressive government. I've never thought that that made much sense because of the huge imbalance between the military power of the public vs. that of the government. And it seems that I was correct."

I received no reply, although his still being in jail may explain that.

Kokesh, incidentally, had a program on RT (Russia Today) for a short while last year.

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William Blum's latest book is "America's Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else"

Remember when people had pensions?

Sam Pizzigati tells how corporate elites are rewarded for taking risks - with your cash

America's corporate chiefs deserve all their hefty rewards, we're told, because they take hefty risks. And what exactly are these richly rewarded corporate chiefs putting at risk? Our retirement security.

How's your 401(k) doing?

Working Americans ask themselves this question – and angst about the answer – a great deal these days. And why not? For most Americans, retirement reality has turned chillingly stark: Either you have a robust set of investments in your 401(k) or you're facing a rocky retirement.

A generation ago, working Americans didn't have to obsess about retirement savings accounts. Americans had pensions, not 401(k)s. These pensions represented a commitment from employers to workers: You work here a set number of years, you can count on a monthly pension at a set amount.

In these traditional pension plans, the risk rested with employers. They shouldered the responsibility for funding a pension plan's "defined benefits."

With 401(k)s, employees have no promised "defined benefit." Their future retirement income depends on how well their 401(k) investments end up doing, not how long and how diligently they work over the course of their careers.

In other words, the retirement risk has

shifted, from employer to employee.

Our current 401(k)s actually began their existence in the 1980s as a supplement to traditional pension plans. But America's top corporate execs would quickly come to see these 401(k)s as a cheaper – for employers – substitute.

Between 1990 and 2010, the share of America's private-sector employees in traditional pension plans fell by nearly half, from 42 to 22 percent. Just about exactly 50 percent of private workers now sit in 401(k)-type arrangements.

This huge switch from traditional pensions to 401(k)s, says a new Economic Policy Institute report, has generated much more than angst among working Americans. This shift has generated much more inequality.

"Retirement insecurity," write the two authors of the new EPI study, economists Monique Morrissey and Natalie Sabadish, "has worsened for most Americans as retirement wealth has become more unequal."

At first glance, the basic retirement savings stats seem to show a much cheerier story. Total retirement assets – both in America's remaining traditional pension plans and in 401(k) and related retirement savings account plans – have soared since the late 1980s, tripling, after adjusting for inflation, to over \$15 trillion.

But precious few of these trillions are bolstering the retirement security of aver-

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A generation ago, working Americans didn't have to obsess about retirement savings accounts

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Only 52 percent of Americans in the middle fifth of the nation's income distribution have savings in retirement accounts, and these accounts average only \$34,981
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age Americans. Nearly half of US households today have no savings in any retirement accounts at all. For Americans in the other half, EPI economists Morrissey and Sabadish show, savings have become “very unevenly distributed.”

Among America's most affluent 20 percent, 88 percent have savings sitting in a 401(k) or similar retirement savings account. The savings in the accounts of these affluent averaged \$308,674 in 2010, the most recent year with data.

In America's statistical middle class, by contrast, a totally different reality. Only 52 percent of Americans in the middle fifth of the nation's income distribution have savings in retirement accounts, and these accounts average only \$34,981.

And in America's poorest fifth, an even bleaker retirement outlook. Only 11 percent of Americans in this fifth have any 401(k) savings, and these savings average just \$7,543.

These unequal outcomes should surprise no one. Participants in 401(k)-type plans have to contribute to participate. In an era of shrinking real paychecks, many employees simply can't afford to set aside much if any money in the 401(k) plans that might be available to them.

In 2010, the IRS reported last week, just under a third of Americans making near \$40,000 socked money away in retirement savings plans. Americans making between \$200,000 and \$500,000 socked away at twice that rate.

The dollars America's highly paid set aside in their 401(k)s, in turn, go on to benefit from both the standard employer's 401(k) matching contribution and the tax breaks that all 401(k) savings enjoy.

The predictable result: The gap between the affluent and everyone else widens. In

2010, American households at the 90th percentile of the retirement savings distribution – households with more retirement savings than 90 percent of households with savings – had retirement nest eggs 100 times larger than the nation's median, or most typical, household with savings.

We have moved, in short, from a traditional pension system where “many retirees could count on predictable, constant streams of income,” as the new EPI study notes, to a system where most Americans can't afford to retire.

“For a large swath of America,” Market-watch analyst Matthew Heimer added last week, Social Security has become “the only remaining financial crutch for retirement.”

In the meantime, many of the same corporate execs who've cut back on traditional worker pension coverage are spearheading the charge for federal budget cutbacks in Social Security.

Last fall, the Institute for Policy Studies looked at the 71 big-time CEOs pushing the “Fix the Debt” campaign to trim Social Security and other major federal “entitlement” programs. These 71 top execs have accumulated, on average, \$9 million each in their own personal company pension plans.

A dozen of these CEOs have over \$20 million in their pension accounts.

If at age 65 these dozen converted their assets to an annuity, the Institute for Policy Studies researchers note, “they would receive a monthly check for at least \$110,000 for life.”

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Sam Pizzigati edits Too Much, the Institute for Policy Studies online weekly on excess and inequality – <http://toomuchonline.org> His latest book is “The Rich Don't Always Win,” published by Seven Stories Press

**Read all back issues of ColdType & The Reader at
<http://coldtype.net/reader.html>**

Obama's rogue state

The US calls on other nations to abide by the treaties it violates, writes **George Monbiot**

You could almost pity these people. For 67 years successive US governments have resisted calls to reform the UN Security Council. They've defended a system which grants five nations a veto over world affairs, reducing all others to impotent spectators. They have abused the powers and trust with which they have been vested. They have collaborated with the other four permanent members (the UK, Russia, China and France) in a colonial carve-up, through which these nations can pursue their own corrupt interests at the expense of peace and global justice.

Eighty-three times the US has exercised its veto. On 42 of these occasions it has done so to prevent Israel's treatment of the Palestinians from being censured. On the last occasion, 130 nations supported the resolution, but Obama spiked it. Though veto powers have been used less often since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the US has exercised them 14 times since then (in 13 cases to shield Israel), while Russia has used them 9 times. Increasingly the permanent members have used the threat of a veto to prevent a resolution from being discussed. They have bullied the rest of the world into silence.

Through this tyrannical dispensation – created at a time when other nations were either broken or voiceless – the great warmongers of the past 60 years remain respon-

sible for global peace. The biggest weapons traders are tasked with global disarmament. Those who trample international law control the administration of justice.

But now, as the veto powers of two permanent members (Russia and China) obstruct its attempt to pour petrol onto another Middle Eastern fire, the United States suddenly decides that the system is illegitimate. "If", Mr Obama says, "we end up using the UN Security Council not as a means of enforcing international norms and international law, but rather as a barrier ... then I think people, rightly, are going to be pretty skeptical about the system". Well, yes.

Never has Obama, or his predecessors, attempted a serious reform of this system. Never have they sought to replace a corrupt global oligarchy with a democratic body. Never do they lament this injustice – until they object to the outcome. The same goes for every aspect of global governance.

Barack Obama warned last month that Syria's use of poisoned gas "threatens to unravel the international norm against chemical weapons embraced by 189 nations". Unravelling the international norm is the US president's job.

In 1997, the United States agreed to decommission the 31,000 tonnes of sarin, VX, mustard gas and other agents it possessed within 10 years. In 2007 it requested the maximum extension of the deadline per-

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The biggest weapons traders are tasked with global disarmament. Those who trample international law control the administration of justice

HYPOCRISY CALLING

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**Looming over all
this is the great
unmentionable:
the cover the
US provides for
Israel's weapons of
mass destruction**
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mitted by the Chemical Weapons Convention: five years. Again it failed to keep its promise, and in 2012 it claimed they would be gone by 2021. Was the world's richest nation unable to complete this task on time? Or just unwilling? Russia has now urged Syria to place its chemical weapons under international control. Perhaps it should press the US to do the same.

In 1998, the Clinton administration pushed a law through Congress that forbade international weapons inspectors from taking samples of chemicals in the US and that allowed the president to refuse unannounced inspections. In 2002, the Bush government forced the sacking of José Mauricio Bustani, the director-general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

He had committed two unforgivable crimes: seeking a rigorous inspection of US facilities and pressing Saddam Hussein to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention, to help prevent the war George Bush was itching to wage.

The US used millions of gallons of chemical weapons in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It also used them during its destruction of Falluja in 2004, then lied about it. The Reagan government helped Saddam Hussein to wage war with Iran in the 1980s, while aware that he was using nerve and mustard gas. (The Bush administration then cited this deployment as an excuse to attack Iraq, 15 years later).

Smallpox has been eliminated from the human population, but two nations – the US and Russia – insist on keeping the pathogen in cold storage. They claim their purpose is to develop defences against possible biological weapons attack, but most experts in the field consider this to be nonsense. While raising concerns about each other's possession of the disease, they have collaborated to bludgeon the other members of the World Health Organisation, which have pressed them to destroy their stocks.

In 2001, the *New York Times* reported

that, without either Congressional oversight or a declaration to the Biological Weapons Convention “the Pentagon has built a germ factory that could make enough lethal microbes to wipe out entire cities.” It claimed the purpose was defensive, but, developed in contravention of international law, it didn't look good. The Bush government also sought to destroy the Biological Weapons Convention as an effective instrument, by scuttling negotiations over the verification protocol required to make it work.

Looming over all this is the great unmentionable: the cover the US provides for Israel's weapons of mass destruction. It's not just that Israel – which refuses to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention – has used white phosphorus as a weapon in Gaza (when deployed against people, phosphorus meets the convention's definition of “any chemical which through its chemical action on life processes can cause death, temporary incapacitation or permanent harm”).

It's also that, as the *Washington Post* points out, “Syria's chemical weapons stockpile results from a never-acknowledged gentleman's agreement in the Middle East that as long as Israel had nuclear weapons, Syria's pursuit of chemical weapons would not attract much public acknowledgement or criticism.” Israel has developed its nuclear arsenal in defiance of the non-proliferation treaty, and the US supports it in defiance of its own law, which forbids the disbursement of aid to a country with unauthorised weapons of mass destruction.

As for the norms of international law, let's remind ourselves where the US stands. It remains outside the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, after declaring its citizens immune from prosecution. The crime of aggression it committed in Iraq – defined by the Nuremberg tribunal as “the supreme international crime” – goes not just unpunished but also unmentioned by anyone in government. The same applies to most of the subsidiary war crimes US troops

committed during the invasion and occupation. Guantanamo Bay raises a finger to any notions of justice between nations.

None of this is to exonerate Bashar al-Asad's government – or its opponents – of a long series of hideous crimes, including the use of chemical weapons. Nor is it to suggest that there is an easy answer to the horrors in Syria.

But Obama's failure to be honest about his nation's record of destroying international norms and undermining international law, his myth-making about the role of the United States in world affairs and his one-sided interventions in the Middle East all render the crisis in Syria even harder to resolve. Until there is some candour about

past crimes and current injustices, until there is an effort to address the inequalities over which the United States presides, everything the US attempts, even if it doesn't involve guns and bombs, will stoke the cynicism and anger the president says he wants to quench.

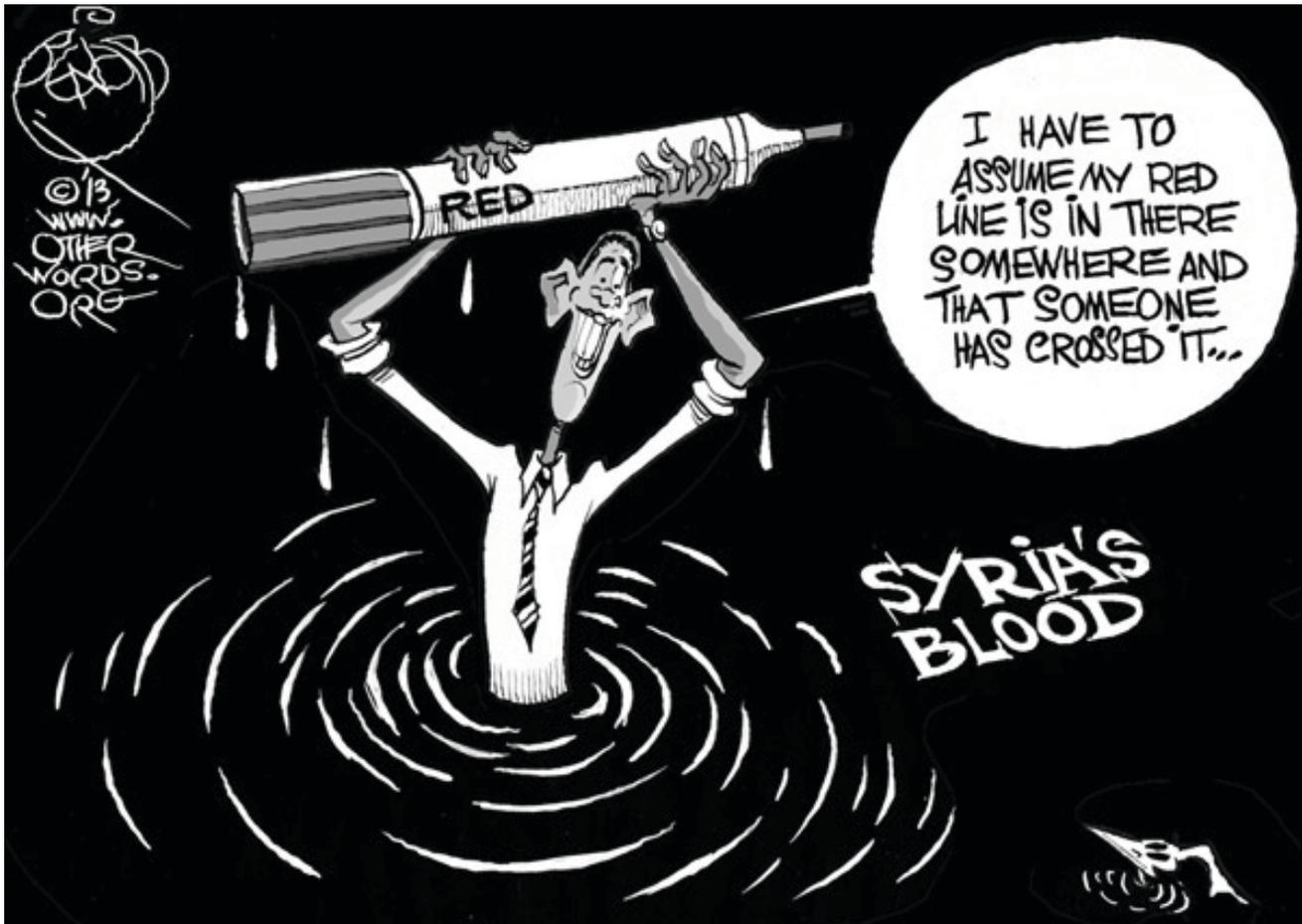
During his first inauguration speech, Barack Obama promised to "to set aside childish things". We all knew what he meant. He hasn't done it. **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book is Feral: "Rewilding The Land, The Sea and Human Life." This essay originally appeared in The Guardian newspaper. More of his work appears at his web site <http://monbiot.com>

Obama's myth-making about the role of the United States in world affairs and his one-sided interventions in the Middle East all render the crisis in Syria even harder to resolve

BENDIB'S WORLD

Khalil Bendib, OtherWords.org



Cause for optimism

In an age of 'realists' and vigilantes, there is cause for optimism, writes **John Pilger**

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Sara De Witt, a student at the time, showed me the place where she was beaten, assaulted and electrocuted
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The most important anniversary of the year was the 40th anniversary of 11 September 1973 – the crushing of the democratic government of Chile by General Augusto Pinochet and Henry Kissinger, then US secretary of state. The National Security Archive in Washington has posted new documents that reveal much about Kissinger's role in an atrocity that cost thousands of lives.

In declassified tapes, Kissinger is heard planning with President Richard Nixon the overthrow of President Salvador Allende. They sound like Mafiosi thugs. Kissinger warns that the "model effect" of Allende's reformist democracy "can be insidious". He tells CIA director Richard Helms: "We will not let Chile go down the drain", to which Helms replies: "I am with you." With the slaughter under way, Kissinger dismisses a warning by his senior officials of the scale of the repression. Secretly, he tells Pinochet, "You did a great service to the West."

I have known many of Pinochet's and Kissinger's victims. Sara De Witt, a student at the time, showed me the place where she was beaten, assaulted and electrocuted. On a wintry day in the suburbs of Santiago, we walked through a former torture centre known as Villa Grimaldi, where hundreds like her suffered terribly and were murdered or "disappeared".

Understanding Kissinger's criminality

is vital when trying to fathom what the US calls its "foreign policy". Kissinger remains an influential voice in Washington, admired and consulted by Barack Obama. When Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain commit crimes with US collusion and weapons, their impunity and Obama's hypocrisy are pure Kissinger. Syria must not have chemical weapons, but Israel can have them and use them. Iran must not have a nuclear programme, but Israel can have more nuclear weapons than Britain. This is known as "realism" or *realpolitik* by Anglo-American academics and think-tanks that claim expertise in "counter-terrorism" and "national security", which are Orwellian terms meaning the opposite.

In recent weeks, the *New Statesman* has published articles by John Bew, an academic at Kings College war studies department, which the cold warrior Laurence Freedman made famous. Bew laments the parliamentary vote that stopped David Cameron joining Obama in lawlessly attacking Syria and the hostility of most British people to bombing other nations. A note at the end of his articles says he will "take up the Henry A. Kissinger Chair in Foreign Policy and International Relations" in Washington. If this is not a black joke, it a profanity on those like Sara de Witt and Kissinger's countless other victims, not least those who died in the holocaust of his and Nixon's secret, il-

legal bombing of Cambodia.

This doctrine of “realism” was invented in the US following the second world war and sponsored by the Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations, the OSS (forerunner of the CIA) and the Council on Foreign relations. In the great universities, students were taught to regard people in terms of their usefulness or expendability: in other words, their threat to “us”. This narcissism served to justify the cold war, its moralising myths and cataclysmic risks, and when that was over, the “war on terror”. Such a “transatlantic consensus” often found its clearest echo in Britain, with the British elite’s enduring nostalgia for empire. Tony Blair used it to commit and justify his war crimes until his lies got the better of him. The violent death of more than a thousand people in Iraq every month is his legacy; yet his views are still courted, and his chief collaborator, Alastair Campbell, is a jolly after-dinner speaker and the subject of obsequious interviews. All the blood, it seems, has been washed away.

Syria is the current project. Outflanked by Russia and public opinion, Obama has now embraced the “path of diplomacy”. Has he? As Russian and US negotiators arrived in Geneva on 12 September, the US increased its support for the Al-Qaeda affiliated militias with weapons sent clandestinely through Turkey, Eastern Europe and the Gulf. The Godfather has no intention of deserting his proxies in Syria. Al Qaeda was all but created by the CIA’s Operation Cyclone that armed the mujahedin in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. Since then, jihadists

have been used to divide and Arab societies and in eliminating the threat of pan-Arab nationalism to western “interests” and Israel’s lawless colonial expansion. This is Kissinger-style “realism”.

In 2006, I interviewed Duane “Dewey” Clarridge, who ran the CIA in Latin America in the 1980s. Here was a true “realist”. Like Kissinger and Nixon on the tapes, he spoke his mind. He referred to Salvador Allende as “whatshisname in Chile” and said “he had to go because it was in our national interests”. When I asked what gave him the right to overthrow governments, he said, “Like it or lump it, we’ll do what we like. So just get used to it, world.”

The world is no longer getting used to it. In a continent ravaged by those whom Nixon called “our bastards”, Latin American governments have defied the likes of Clarridge and implemented much of Allende’s dream of social democracy – which was Kissinger’s fear. Today, most of Latin America is independent of US foreign policy and free of its vigilantism. Poverty has been cut almost by half; children live beyond the age of five; the elderly learn to read and write. These remarkable advances are invariably reported in bad faith in the west and ignored by the “realists”. That must never lessen their value as a source of optimism and inspiration for all of us. **CT**

John Pilger’s new film, Utopia, will have its premiere at the National Film Theatre in London on 3 October and open in cinemas in November. This article was first published in the New Statesman

The violent death of more than a thousand people in Iraq every month is Tony Blair’s legacy; yet his views are still courted, and his chief collaborator, Alastair Campbell, is a jolly after-dinner speaker and the subject of obsequious interviews. All the blood, it seems, has been washed away



Licensed to kill

John W. Whitehead on the growing phenomenon of police shooting unarmed civilians

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It is no longer unusual to hear about an incident in which police shoot unarmed individuals first and ask questions late
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Here's a recipe for disaster: Take a young man (or woman), raise him on a diet of violence, hype him up on the power of the gun in his holster and the superiority of his uniform, render him woefully ignorant of how to handle a situation without resorting to violence, train him well in military tactics but allow him to be illiterate about the Constitution, and never stress to him that he is to be a peacemaker and a peacekeeper, respectful of and subservient to the taxpayers, who are in fact his masters and employers.

Once you have fully indoctrinated this young man (or woman) on the idea that the police belong to a brotherhood of sorts, with its own honor code and rule of law, then place this person in situations where he will encounter individuals who knowingly or unknowingly challenge his authority, where he may, justifiably or not, feel threatened, and where he will have to decide between firing a weapon or, the more difficult option, adequately investigating a situation in order to better assess the danger and risk posed to himself and others, and then act on it by defusing the tension or de-escalating the violence.

I'm not talking about a situation so obviously fraught with risk that there is no other option but to shoot, although I am hard pressed to consider what that might be outside of the sensationalized Hollywood hos-

tage crisis scenario. I'm talking about the run-of-the mill encounters between police and citizens that occur daily. In an age when police are increasingly militarized, weaponised and protected by the courts, these once-routine encounters are now inherently dangerous for any civilian unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I'm not the only one concerned, either. Indeed, I've been contacted by many older cops equally alarmed by the attitudes and behaviors of younger police today, the foot soldiers in the emerging police state. Yet as I point out in my new book, *A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State*, this is what happens when you go from a representative democracy in which all members are subject to the rule of law to a hierarchical one in which there is one set of laws for the rulers and another, far more stringent set, for the ruled.

Hence, it is no longer unusual to hear about an incident in which police shoot unarmed individuals first and ask questions later. This is becoming all too common. For example, on September 14 alone, there were two separate police shootings of unarmed individuals, resulting in death and/or injury to innocent individuals – and those are just the shootings that happened to make national headlines.

The first shooting incident took place in Charlotte, N.C., when three police officers

responded to a 911 “breaking and entering” call in which a homeowner reported that a man she didn’t know or recognize had been knocking at her door repeatedly. Upon arriving on scene, the police saw a man matching the caller’s description running towards them. One officer fired a stun gun, after which the second officer opened fire on the unarmed 24-year-old, who died on the scene. Only afterwards did police realize the dead man, a former football player, had been in a car accident and was likely approaching them for help.

Later that same day, in New York’s Times Square, police officers shot into a crowd of tourists, aiming for a 35-year-old man who had been reportedly weaving among cars and loosely gesturing with his hands in his pockets. The cops missed the man, who was unarmed, and shot a 54-year-old woman in the knee and another woman in the buttock. The man was eventually subdued with a Taser.

Just a few weeks earlier, in Florida, 60-year-old Roy Middleton was shot in the leg by police when he wandered out to his Lincoln Town car, which was parked in his mother’s driveway, in search of cigarettes in the wee hours of the morning. A neighbor, seeing Middleton, reported him to 911 as a possible robber. Police, after ordering the unarmed black man out of the car, began firing on Middleton, who likened the experience to a “firing squad. Bullets were flying everywhere.” The car was reportedly riddled with bullets and 17 shell casings were on scene. Defending their actions, the two police officers claim that Middleton, who had a metallic object in his hand, “made a lunging motion” out of the car causing them to “fear for their safety.” That metallic object was a key chain with a flashlight attached.

These are not isolated incidents. Law enforcement officials are increasingly responding to unsubstantiated fears for their safety and perceived challenges to their “authority” by drawing and using their weapons.

For example, Miami-Dade police

slammed a 14-year-old boy to the ground, putting him in a chokehold and handcuffing him after he allegedly gave them “dehumanizing stares” and walked away from them, which the officers found unacceptable. According to Miami-Dade Police Detective Alvaro Zabaleta, “His body language was that he was stiffening up and pulling away... When you have somebody resistant to them and pulling away and somebody clenching their fists and flailing their arms, that’s a threat. Of course we have to neutralize the threat.”

Unfortunately, this mindset that any challenge to police authority is a threat that needs to be “neutralized” is a dangerous one that is part of a greater nationwide trend that sets law enforcement officers beyond the reach of the Fourth Amendment. Equally problematic is the trend in the courts that acquits officers involved in such shootings, letting them off with barely a slap to the wrists.

This begs the question: what exactly are we teaching these young officers in the police academy when the slightest thing, whether it be a hand in a pocket, a man running towards them, a flashlight on a keychain, or a dehumanizing stare can ignite a strong enough “fear for their safety” to justify doing whatever is deemed necessary to neutralize the threat, even if it means firing on an unarmed person?

The problem, notes Jerome Skolnick and former New York City police officer/Temple University criminal justice professor James Fyfe in their book *Above the Law: Police and the Excessive Use of Force*, is that police work is often viewed by those in the force as an us-versus-them war rather than a chance for community-oriented engagement and problem solving. The authors also point to a lack of accountability as one of the reasons why police violence persists. They acknowledge that, yes, police officers are placed in dangerous situations that at times require immediate responses. But they maintain that that doesn’t excuse using more force

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What exactly are we teaching these young officers in the police academy when the slightest thing, whether it be a hand in a pocket, a man running towards them, a flashlight on a keychain, or a dehumanizing stare can ignite a strong enough “fear for their safety” to justify doing whatever is deemed necessary to neutralize the threat, even if it means firing on an unarmed person?

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After an altercation in which the young man resisted police and fled to his mother's house, police officers pursued him, kicked down his mother's door and opened fire
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than is needed to subdue someone, the lack of professional training that leads to such fear-based responses, or treating citizens as enemy combatants.

As Titania Kumeh reports in *Mother Jones*, this has been coming on for a long time. Remember back in 1999, when four plainclothes New York police officers shot and killed a 22-year-old unarmed immigrant who was standing in the doorway of his apartment? The cops thought the young man was reaching for his gun – it turned out to be his wallet – and fired 41 shots at him, landing 19 on his body. The cops were acquitted of all charges.

In 2003, an unarmed man, kneeling before four Las Vegas police officers, was shot with an assault rifle because one of the officers “feared” the unarmed man was feigning surrender and about to grab a gun. A jury ruled the shooting excusable.

In 2006, plainclothes police officers, again in New York, fired 50 shots into a car after it reportedly rammed into their unmarked van, killing the 23-year-old driver who had just left his bachelor party and wounding his two friends. Police claimed they had been following the men, suspecting one of them had a gun. Again, the cops were cleared of all charges.

In 2010, in California, police shot and killed a young man who had allegedly committed some sort of traffic violation while riding his bicycle. After an altercation in which the young man resisted police and fled to his mother's house, police officers pursued him, kicked down his mother's door and opened fire.

That same year, in Long Beach, California, police responded with heavy firepower to a perceived threat by a man holding a water hose. The 35-year-old man had reportedly been watering his neighbor's lawn when police, interpreting his “grip” on the water hose to be consistent with that of someone discharging a firearm, opened fire. The father of two was pronounced dead at the scene.

Skip ahead to 2013 and you have the 16-year-old teenager who skipped school only to be shot by police after they mistook him for a fleeing burglar. Not to mention the July 26 shooting of an unarmed black man in Austin “who was pursued and shot in the back of the neck by Austin Police... after failing to properly identify himself and leaving the scene of an unrelated incident.” And don't forget the 19-year-old Seattle woman who was accidentally shot in the leg by police after she refused to show her hands.

Make no mistake, whereas these shootings of unarmed individuals by what Slate terms “trigger happy” cops used to take place primarily in big cities, that militarized, urban warfare mindset among police has spread to small-town America.

No longer is this just a problem for immigrants, or people of color, or lower income communities, or young people who look like hooligans, out for trouble. We're all in this together, black and white, rich and poor, urban and suburban, guilty and innocent alike. We're all viewed the same by the powers that be: as potential lawbreakers to be viewed with suspicion and treated like criminals.

Whether you're talking about police shootings of unarmed individuals, NSA surveillance, drones taking to the skies domestically, SWAT team raids, or roadside strip searches, they're all part of a totalitarian continuum, mile markers on this common road we're traveling towards the police state. The sign before us reads “Danger Ahead.” What remains to be seen is whether we can put the brakes on and safely reverse direction before it's too late to turn back. **CT**

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John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute and editor of GadflyOnline.com. His latest book “A Government Of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State” (SB Press) is available at www.amazon.com

The Watchman's File

An excerpt – the Prologue and first chapter – from Barry Lando's new novel, *The Watchman's File*

PROLOGUE

STOCKHOLM, FEBRUARY 1943

Kowalski couldn't believe his luck. An intelligence coup for the history books!

The next morning in Stockholm, he passed the unprocessed microfilm and the wire recording, along with a coded report, to the courier. Then he walked back toward the Karl XII Hotel.

He was so exhilarated that he never noticed the heavysset man in a leather jacket walking toward him until the man blocked his path, smiled a great friendly smile, and asked in Swedish for a match. He reeked of garlic.

Kowalski said he didn't smoke and attempted to step around him.

"Halt! stehen bleiben," barked Garlic Mouth in German. He pulled his left hand from his pocket to reveal a snub-nosed Beretta. A black Mercedes sedan swished to a halt at the curb. The back door swung open.

"Herein," ordered Garlic Mouth. He jammed the Beretta into Kowalski's spine and propelled him into the rear seat. A burly confederate already sitting there yanked Kowalski's arms behind him and snapped handcuffs on his wrists. Then he stuffed a filthy rag into his mouth, and slipped a coarse woolen hood reeking of fuel oil over his head. Kowalski gagged. He felt the bile rise in his throat; he would suffocate in his own vomit. He tried to

remember his months of training. Don't panic. Keep alert. Stay in control. Easy enough for his instructor to say.

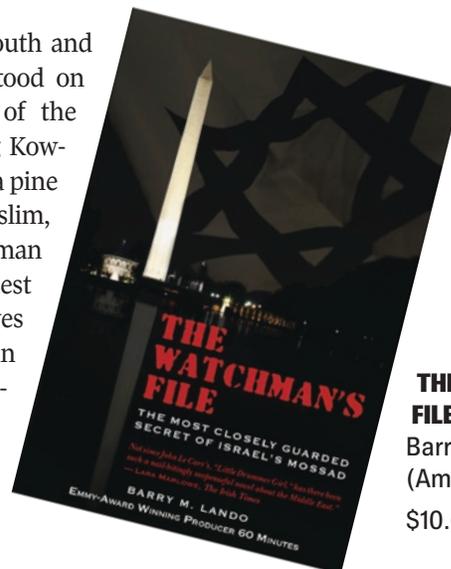
After what seemed about half an hour, the car stopped. A revolver was thrust in his ribs. He was propelled out the door, grabbed by the arms, frog-marched forward ten steps; then down a flight of stairs.

It stank of soot and coal dust and sewage. Fifteen more steps, then left, another door, more steps; he was backed onto a wooden chair.

The hood was yanked from his head; the rag pulled from his mouth. He closed his eyes momentarily to the glare. He was in a small, dank basement room. There were no windows, just a single bright overhead light.

Garlic Mouth and his friend stood on either side of the chair. Facing Kowalski across a pine desk was a slim, elegant man with the palest of blue eyes and a thin blond moustache. He would have been handsome, al-

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.....



THE WATCHMAN'S FILE

Barry Lano
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\$10.67

.....
**They began
breaking the bones
of his fingers.
They bent them
until Avi could
hear them crack,
one at a time,
like the wishbone
of a Friday-night
chicken**
.....

most beautiful – a movie star or male model – were it not for the left side of his face, mottled red and cratered as if roasted in a blaze. His neck was hidden by a brown foulard. He had an unlit cigarette in his mouth. His voice was high, almost a woman’s, and calm, so calm, as he began in German.

“Your name?”

“Stanislaw Kowalski.”

“You are from where?”

“From Warsaw.” He struggled for outrage. “I am a Polish businessman and – ”

“You lie,” said the man quietly. He nodded toward Garlic Mouth, who grabbed Kowalski’s wrists, still cuffed together, and wrenched them violently upward. An excruciating pain ripped through Kowalski’s shoulders and shot across his back.

“Schweinhund!” screamed Kowalski.

“Your name is Avi Ben Simon,” said the inquisitor, reading from a paper in front of him.

The prisoner’s gut tightened again. “No. Stanislaw Kowalski,” he insisted. He could feel the sweat trickling down his back.

Another cheerless nod. A second vicious jolt from Garlic Mouth left the prisoner gasping with pain.

“You are Avi Ben Simon. You are from Warsaw—but not a businessman. You are a Jew. A spy.” The inquisitor stood – he was tall, well built – and came around the table to stand before the prisoner. He wore a soft, fragrant cologne. He showed the prisoner the paper he’d been reading from. The prisoner said nothing; there was no point. His shoulders felt as if they’d been ripped from his body. The pain throbbed through him.

“And so, you see, we know all about you. Now why don’t you fill in a few details? Then we can all go our separate ways.”

So this is how it ends, thought Avi Ben Simon. What irony: to flee the Nazis in Warsaw; to be trapped by them in Stockholm. No hero’s return to my new homeland.

But he could still win, if he could only control his fear. There’d been instruction on this from a psychiatrist during training: If caught

you can expect to be tortured. Brutally. These Nazi thugs knew nothing about the conversation he’d recorded yesterday, nor that he’d been able to dispatch it with the courier. Avi would give them nothing.

In the cellar, the interrogator continued solemnly with his questions. Avi refused to answer. They finished wrenching his left shoulder from its socket. He shrieked with pain. What was it the psychiatrist had said? If tortured, the only escape is to go into yourself, as deep and dark and as far as you can. They paused for a question. Then they wrenched the right shoulder. Another question. No answer.

As deep and dark and far as you can.

So, as the Germans meticulously shattered his body, Avi fled to the past. He summoned memories, frame by frame: A sesame cake still warm from the oven – an incredible luxury. It was the last meal with his family before he crawled through the sewers and escaped to the forests North of Warsaw.

They began breaking the bones of his fingers. They bent them until Avi could hear them crack, one at a time, like the wishbone of a Friday-night chicken. He wouldn’t talk. He-would-not-talk. He was holding hands with Hannah Lebel from across the street in Warsaw. She laughed as he told his clever jokes.

When he lost consciousness, they revived him with smelling salts and a bucket of freezing water. And still he fled. He sat proudly in the State Loge of the Warsaw Conservatory as his mother played Chopin. And now it was coming, he dimly thought. He was a child by the pond in Wenceslaus Park, watching the marvelous toy sailboat his father gave him, as it caught a gust and glided off across the waters. It could glide forever.

The inquisitor realized he’d lost his prisoner and wearied of the game. He gave a final sad nod. Garlic Mouth wrapped his left arm around the captive’s head, seized his chin with his right hand, and twisted sharply, farther than Avi Ben Simon had ever turned his head before.

CHAPTER 1 RECENTLY, IN ISRAEL

Dov Ben-David cursed as he strode down the hill at Ein Gedi. He'd been looking forward to an afternoon at home on the kibbutz when the call came. It was Hannah Ginsberg at the kibbutz's spa, a quarter mile away by the turgid, gun-metal waters of the Dead Sea. The computer had crashed—again.

“So? Reboot,” said Dov.

“I did. Still doesn't work.”

“What about Schmuel?”

“In Beersheba.”

Son of a bitch. The entire spa paralyzed because of a Paleolithic computer and a klutzy manager. So here he was: Dov Ben-David, the former deputy director of Israel's feared Mossad, the man responsible for liquidating anyone who posed a mortal threat to the Jewish State – from Palestinian terrorists to Iranian nuclear scientists – here he was, turning his day upside down to deal with a problem a ten-year-old child could fix. But not Hannah Ginsberg. She'd drown in a saucer of tea.

Dov was a tall, lanky man, with great bushy eyebrows and dark, penetrating eyes; seventy-two years old, sinewy, and fit. He wore khaki shorts, sandals, and a tattered straw hat to shield his balding head. It was hot, bloody hot: perspiration was already coursing down his ruddy face. He should be at home, napping, before undertaking his daily afternoon of writing and research on one or another arcane topic of ancient Israeli archaeology.

What better counterpoint to a life dedicated to duplicity and death? Since his first years at Ein Gedi, Dov had become obsessed with deciphering the past. Now, in retirement, he could spend all the time he wanted exploring the ancient ruins, caves, and crevices on the Israeli side of the rift valley that had been home to man for the past four thousand years. In a moment of weakness, he had also agreed to use his once-feared organizational skills to help run Ein Gedi's Dead Sea Spa. That, he now knew, was a major mistake. He'd resign

at the end of the year.

He walked into the coffee shop, glared at Hannah Ginsberg, and headed for the computer at the cashier's desk. Hannah shrugged, brought him a cup of tea, and then went back to wiping off the countertop. Avram Levy, the graying, pudgy kibbutz security guard, was at the food counter concentrating on his daily crossword puzzle. Three tables were filled with French tourists having an early afternoon snack.

Dov took a seat at the cashier's desk and glowered at the computer: an ancient, hulking IBM, an embarrassing relic. The kibbutz could never seem to find the money to buy a new one. Dov waited while it rebooted. It was like watching the tide come in.

Hopefully, he might still have an hour or so back at home before the American reporter arrived, a chance to shower, collect his thoughts. He was surprised at how rattled he'd been by the news. Was it age? Not at all. His mind was still fit. He'd had to deal with all kinds of alarming information during his long clandestine career. But he knew when to push the panic button, and he knew it was now.

The potential for disaster was far too fearsome to be ignored – and still he had hesitated. This was perilous ground. Let someone else act this time. He had spent too much of his life risking his skin for his country. Why put himself on the line again?

Essentially, because he had no choice: he alone understood the danger. The consequences could be catastrophic – for Israel and the United States.

He'd considered his options. He could alert old Israeli contacts; he had an impressive network. But no, that wouldn't do. He had to reach out further for allies. He had to totally destroy the threat.

So he'd made the call.

The reporter would be here in a couple of hours.

Together they would expose the entire story to the world.

He vaguely saw the silver van come to a stop in the no parking zone next to the en-

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.....

.....
**He swore aloud,
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trance to the spa. A young Arab-looking kid in jeans and a T-shirt got out and walked quickly away. A bit too quickly. "Avram," said Dov, "Why don't you check out the van."

He turned his attention back to the computer, but when there was no acknowledgement from the security guard, he looked up again to see the men's room door swinging shut. He glanced towards the window again.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash.

He swore aloud, but his words were lost in a deafening blast that shattered the plate glass window before him.

He saw the silver van disintegrating as it hurtled toward him, and then there was nothing more to see.

A giant claw ripped at his throat and lifted his body into the air, slowly, as if in a dream.

* * * *

El Al flight 746 from Paris bounced once on the runway and then swerved slightly to the left as it raced past the control tower, flaps down and reverse thrusters roaring. Ed Diamond could feel his pulse beating wildly by the time the Boeing 737 lurched to a halt with a squeal of tires. This is what happens when fighter pilots become airline pilots, he thought as he retrieved his laptop and suitcase from the overhead bin. Ed himself was a lousy flier, always had been – the original sweaty palms. Not much of an asset for a reporter who made his living traveling around the globe. The stewardess whom he'd been chatting up during the flight rolled her eyes and smiled apologetically as he headed for the exit.

The plane was half empty; few tourists were coming these days. Three burly young men, M-4s bulging under their canvas jackets, stood at the gate. They surveyed the deplaning passengers as if, at any moment, one of the arrivals might lob a hand grenade or loose a murderous blast from a Kalashnikov.

They were the only discordant note to the modern, brilliantly lit hallways, the pageant of glitzy billboards and sprawling duty-free stores celebrating the country's glittering hi-tech façade. The only country with more cell phones per capita is Finland, the home of Nokia, he thought.

At the immigration counter, a beady-eyed woman with the rank of captain licked her thumb as she turned the pages of Ed's passport. If it had been Kennedy, the immigration officer would have greeted him with a wide, ego-soothing smile of recognition and complimented him on the latest broadcast. Not the scowling Israeli captain. She examined the stamps from Damascus, Kabul, Tripoli, and Teheran with growing concern and then flipped back to page one to scrutinize Ed's picture and data – born Seattle, Washington; 6'1", hazel-blue eyes, brown hair. She lifted her eyes and glared at Ed as if he were the new head of Al Qaeda.

"You've been to all these places?"

"I'm a reporter."

"For what company?"

"NBS. American television. A program called Focus."

She raised her eyebrows. "You have a reporter's ID?"

He showed the press card he'd been issued on his last trip to Israel.

"You've come to tell the truth about Israel?"

Ed understood it wasn't a joke. "I always do."

"Sure. You all do," she muttered. "OK. Go ahead."

"No 'Shalom. Welcome to Israel?'"

She ignored the gibe and gestured impatiently for the next person to step forward.

The newspapers carried unconfirmed reports that Syria had put its troops on alert. Despite the Wall, there'd been another upsurge of terrorism in Israel: a suicide bombing in Nathanya, a drive-by shooting last night near Jenin.

But the real shocker was news of an American missile strike on an underground biological weapons site that was being constructed in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan. According to latest reports, the site was a joint project between Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and – most surprising of all – a small, radical Palestinian group, the Sons of the Prophet, its followers dedicated to anni-

hilating the state of Israel.

Outside the terminal, the warm afternoon breeze carried a faint scent of eucalyptus. Ed had removed his suede windbreaker and was wearing a white linen shirt and light brown slacks. He walked past the drivers lounging by the taxi station to the Avis lot, where he picked up the Ford Mustang his office had reserved.

He drove east along the highway to Jerusalem, past the urban sprawl of Greater Tel Aviv: high-rise apartments and high-tech factories that spread across the coastal plain eating into the green strips of farmland, where sprinklers sprayed glistening arcs. Then up into the Judean hills with their shady forests of pine, cypress, and eucalyptus. He had been coming here for the past fifteen years, often to see the same man he'd been summoned to meet today, Dov Ben-David.

Ed had first met Ben-David when he was researching a story about Hamas and arms smuggling from Egypt. It was a tale the Mossad wanted to get out, and Ben-David was their acknowledged expert. He provided enough nuggets about the radical Palestinians to win Ed another Emmy. After that, Ed continued consulting Ben-David on everything from the Russian Mafia to the financial networks of Osama bin Laden to Iran's nuclear program. Ben-David had impeccable sources everywhere. "The tools we use may be brutal," he once told Ed. "But remember, we are fighting for our country's survival."

Over the last few years, however, Dov had increasingly questioned Israel's tactics; though, of course, only in private. Ed recalled the last time he'd seen him. It was just after the massive attack on Gaza. Dov was still the Mishne, as he was called in Hebrew – but he'd become sullen, scowling, oppressed by the increasingly bloody conflict with the Palestinians. What had begun under his guidance as a very precise campaign – carefully planned, targeted assassinations of the most radical Palestinian leaders, the men who trained and commanded the missile teams and suicide bombers – had spiraled completely out of control.

The TV screen was now filled each day with grisly images of noncombatants – old men, women, and children – also blown apart by Israeli helicopter gunships and drones. In some cases, the Israeli government actually apologized to the bereaved families for their "mistake."

"At first I thought the idea of targeted assassinations might work," Ben-David had told Ed. "I mean if the Palestinian leadership wouldn't get rid of their killers, we'd do it ourselves. But it hasn't worked. It's made things even worse. Now our crazies are as wild as theirs. God knows where we're heading."

A couple of months later, Ben-David resigned from the Mossad and returned with his wife to the kibbutz at Ein Gedi.

There had been no further word from him – until yesterday. Ed had been in the edit room of his office in Paris, contemplating the image of a gangling African boy on the Sony monitor. The kid wore an Avatar T-shirt and brandished an AK-47. He couldn't have been more than ten or eleven; he glared at the camera with wild, dilated eyes.

It was a spectacular image for what was to have been a sensational report: hopped-up child soldiers exploited by ruthless buccaneers ready to rip apart a swath of Africa to make a fortune in diamonds. A brutal, cynical trade that the UN and all the countries involved had sworn to suppress years ago, but there it was, still flourishing. Yet Ed's report wasn't working: the issues were too complex, the politics too convoluted. There were too many countries no one cared about. The thing would plunge the viewers into a coma.

Bottom line: it was not the kind of broadcast Focus's star reporter was supposed to be coming up with, particularly not now as he jockeyed for a decisive promotion. He had been promised a weekly hour-long broadcast of his own, with the notoriety, power, and seven-figure salary that went with it. It was everything he'd been working toward for the past twenty years.

But right now, he still had this African mess to clean up, somehow.

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.....

BOOK EXCERPT

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Suddenly, an ambulance from the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem came barreling toward him; it flashed by, its siren howling, dust flaring in the sun. Careening after it, with the same banshee wail, came another ambulance, then another
.....

He was interrupted by his assistant, Colleen Fisher. “Ed, call for you – from Israel, Dov Ben-David.”

Ed cocked his head to one side, his forehead creased. “Tell him I’m not in,” he said. “No, tell him I’ll call back when I get a chance.”

Dov Ben-David was a nice guy, but no longer what you might call a hot source.

“He says he’s got to talk to you – now.”

“Merde,” Ed muttered as he picked up the phone. “Dov,” he said heartily. “It’s been a long time.”

“Maybe, Ed. But it’s a battle just getting through to you.”

“No, it’s just that...”

“It’s OK. A lot of people are no longer particularly eager to take my calls.”

“Any time,” said Ed, trying to sound interested.

“You know what I worry about these days?” said the Israeli. “Not terrorists, but tourists. God help me if I don’t have enough toilet paper and sanitary pads in stock, But don’t worry. I didn’t call to waste your time with the kvetching of an old man.”

“So, what can I do for you?”

“Come and see me in Israel. Now. It’s very important.”

“Love to. But I have work. What’s it about?”

“I can’t say right now, you understand?”

“How about a hint?”

“Ed, look, something has happened.” Dov’s tone was urgent. “It is about your country and mine. It is serious – believe me.”

“Yeah?” Ed still wasn’t convinced.

There was an edge now to Dov’s voice. “When was the last time I picked up the phone to tell you about a report you should do?”

“Never. I always had to pry the information out of you.”

“So – stop making me waste my breath. Come!”

Ed paused. He glanced at the images on the editing console again. Perhaps Ben-David was losing it – but perhaps not. He had never been one to exaggerate. Ed could make it to Israel and back in a couple of days. It would be a welcome break from this African quagmire.

“OK. I’ll be there tomorrow afternoon. And Dov?”

“Yes.”

“Tell Esther I never forgot her borscht.”

Another hour and a half to go, thought Ed as he sipped a bottle of water. He bypassed Jerusalem and continued through hardscrabble gulches, home to a few remaining Bedouins, their camels and donkeys hobbled next to their battered pickups. The road turned south, dipped into the Judean Desert. On the right, the bone-dry mountains and gorges of what geologists call the Afro-Syrian Rift; ahead and to the left, the Dead Sea shimmered in the late-afternoon heat.

Suddenly, an ambulance from the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem came barreling toward him; it flashed by, its siren howling, dust flaring in the sun. Careening after it, with the same banshee wail, came another ambulance, then another.

A terrorist attack at Masada or Beersheba, thought Ed. It was just after five p.m. He turned on the car radio and found the English-language news broadcast from Kol Yisrael.

“...three other people were injured. The blast occurred at three forty-five this afternoon. According to reports, the explosive charge was placed in a Volkswagen van parked near the café. Two of the injured were tourists. No one has yet claimed responsibility.

“Meanwhile in Damascus, the US secretary of state refused comment after completing talks with the Syrian president. Sources close to the secretary were ‘disappointed’ by the lack of progress.”

Jesus, thought Ed as the announcer rattled on, how the hell can anyone live with the constant tension in this place, the threat of violence always ready to explode? A military jeep and van roared by, headed north.

At the turnoff for the kibbutz, he saw where all the emergency traffic was coming from: a few hundred yards down the highway was a cluster of military jeeps and trucks. Soldiers in olive-green battle dress had cordoned off a group of buildings by the Dead Sea: the Ein Gedi Spa.

Ed parked and walked to the checkpoint. A gaggle of German tourists had stopped, and one of them, a potbellied blonde, was chattering into her cell phone, giving a strident account to friends or family in Germany. The others were taking pictures of one another posed in front of the soldiers.

A stringy, gray-haired reservist manned the checkpoint, a TAR-21 slung from his shoulder. Ed produced his Israeli press pass.

“Only emergency workers allowed through.”

“What happened?” asked Ed.

“A car bomb at the spa.”

“When?”

“I don’t know,” the reservist snapped. “Two hours ago. Maybe less. I can’t talk to media.”

The explosion had hit thirty yards away. The van must have been parked by the front door of the spa’s café. Shards of painted silver metal, twisted steel and chrome, were all that remained of the vehicle. The blast had cratered the highway, knocked a hole in the cement wall of the coffee shop, blown out the door and all the windows.

Two investigators in plain clothes were picking through the debris, taking measurements and notes as they went. Three young men wearing bright yellow vests – ultra-Orthodox volunteers from the Zaka organization – were carefully collecting body parts and shards of human flesh, some hanging from the branches of the palm trees, to return to their families for religious burial.

There was still a thin veil of dust and a faint, acrid smell in the air. Ed coughed a couple of times. He could already feel his chest tightening. An army colonel wearing wraparound sunglasses and the double-eagle insignia of AMAN came over. Between coughs, Ed again produced his press pass.

“No comment,” said the colonel. He was obviously from the States originally.

“Just tell me, off the record, what happened?” Ed paused for a breath. “I’ve a friend who lives here.”

“Can’t do.” The officer nodded toward the nearby hill. “Ask at the kibbutz.”

Ed gasped again, and the officer’s eyes abruptly narrowed as the reporter reached for his pocket and withdrew a dark-blue device.

“Asthma,” said Ed. “The dust.” The last thing he needed was for this hair-trigger colonel to think he was reaching for a weapon. He inserted the inhaler in his mouth, pressed, and inhaled deeply. After a few minutes, he could feel the bronchial passages opening, but the relief was only temporary. His breathing was still labored. He had to get away from the site and the irritants swirling in the air.

He walked unsteadily to his car, drove back to the highway, and waited there for a few minutes until the attack had receded. Then he took the asphalt road that wound up the hill to Ein Gedi, passed a soccer field, where teenagers in blue shorts and T-shirts scampered about as if car bombs were a daily occurrence, and pulled into the parking lot by the dining hall and a newly built auditorium. Children ran laughing through sprinklers that watered the thick green lawn. Tidy flowerbeds lined the paths leading to the bungalows. This could be a middle-class suburb anywhere in the Southwest, thought Ed, if it weren’t for the Israeli flag flapping in the breeze, the security fence ringing the entire settlement, and those young men back at the blast site and their baskets of human flesh.

There was a cluster of people at the entrance to the dining hall. They stared at Ed as he approached. He stopped before a squat man wearing a Dodgers baseball cap, sandals, and khaki shorts. He was peeling an orange.

“Shalom,” said Ed, “can you tell me where is the house of Dov Ben-David?”

“Who wants to know?” The man put a wedge of orange into his mouth.

“Ed Diamond. I’m, uh, an old friend of Dov’s.”

“It’s too soon to be making condolence calls, don’t you think?”

The man squinted against the sun and tossed the orange peel into the dust. “Dov – he’s dead, alev hashalom, killed by the bomb.”

CT

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Jesus, thought Ed as the announcer rattled on, how the hell can anyone live with the constant tension in this place, the threat of violence always ready to explode?

.....
Barry Lando is an Emmy-Award winning former 60 Minutes Producer

Drones and gadflies

Brian Terrell frames the debate on war by remote control

.....
In the Federal Prison Camp at Yankton, South Dakota, I had watched from afar as the discussion on drone warfare emerged from the fringe and into the mainstream
.....

On May 23, President Obama gave a major address from the National Defense University, ON THE FUTURE OF OUR FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM, in which he acknowledged for the first time the US government's still officially secret program of assassination by remotely controlled drones. I was able to watch this televised speech from the privileged vantage of a federal prison on the last day of a sentence resulting from my protest of drones lethally operated from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri over various countries around the world.

Over the previous six months in the Federal Prison Camp at Yankton, South Dakota, I had watched from afar as the discussion on drone warfare emerged from the fringe and into the mainstream. Fellow prisoners brought me clippings on the subject from their local newspapers and kept me apprised of what they heard on the evening news. The American people seemed to be just awakening to the reality and consequences of wars being fought and assassinations carried out by unmanned but heavily armed planes controlled by combatants sitting at computer screens at stateside bases far from the conflict.

My own anti-drone activism began with protests at Creech Air Force Base in the Nevada desert in April, 2009. Even some otherwise well informed people were

skeptical, back then, that such things were even possible, much less happening daily. Many who were aware accepted the simple and happy narrative of drone warfare as a precise new high-tech system in which soldiers from a safe distance of thousands of miles can pin point those who mean us imminent harm with little or no collateral damage.

Even some among our friends in the peace movement questioned the wisdom of focusing attention on drones. Must we protest every new advance in weaponry? Can't we allow for methods that are at least improvements on indiscriminate carnage? Is not a precisely aimed and delivered drone attack preferable to carpet bombing? Is it not preferable to invasion? Does it make a difference to the victims, in any case, whether there is a pilot in the plane that bombs them or not?

The fact that four years later on the day before my release from prison, the president of the United States was defending the use of drones before the country and the world is truly remarkable. This is not a discussion that he or anyone else in the government, politics or the military encouraged or one that the media was anxious to take on. The fact that the issue is up for discussion at all is due to considerable efforts of the few here in the US and the UK in solidarity with many in the streets

in Pakistan, Yemen and Afghanistan protesting this foul weaponry. Communities of protest and resistance in Nevada, New York, California, Missouri, Wisconsin, England and Iowa thrust the issue into local forums, courts and media through creative actions and legal stratagems, effectively demanding that grievance over drone killing be heard. The president's own speech was itself only rescued from being the cleverly constructed but empty litany of alibi, half-truth and obfuscation that it was intended to be by the interruption by our friend, Medea Benjamin.

In his 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., noted that often a society like ours "bogged down in the tragic attempt to live in monologue rather than dialogue," requires "nonviolent gadflies" in order to "create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal."

As with the issue of segregation 50 years ago, so today the parameters of discussion allowed by politeness and good manners or sanctioned by the police and courts simply cannot abide the objective appraisal of drone warfare that the times require. The discussion such as it is, is made possible only by some who dare speak out of turn, as Medea, or who use their bodies to intrude on the orderly commission of criminalities in our midst. Before the president's lecture, drone warfare's approval rating was at the top of the polls but a month later drone pilot Col. Bryan Davis of the Ohio Air National Guard noted a turn of the tide. "We are not popular among the American public, every other base has been protested," he lamented to a local paper. "It doesn't make you feel warm inside."

Changing narrative

The narrative of humanitarian war via

drone had begun to unravel in the public eye in the months leading up to the president's speech and has since fallen further into disrepute. Months before the president made the assertion in his May 23 speech that "by narrowly targeting our action against those who want to kill us and not the people they hide among, we are choosing the course of action least likely to result in the loss of innocent life," his administration had already revised earlier claims that the drone programs in Yemen and Pakistan had yielded zero known non-combatant deaths to one death to finally admitting to a death toll in "single digits." By almost any accounting the noncombatant tolls in those countries have been at least in the hundreds.

Just weeks after the president spoke at the National Defense University, a journal published by that institution published a study that debunked his assurance that "conventional airpower and missiles are far less precise than drones, and likely to cause more civilian casualties and local outrage." Drone strikes in Afghanistan, the study found, were "an order of magnitude more likely to result in civilian casualties per engagement."

Another assurance given in this speech, that "America cannot take strikes wherever we choose; our actions are bound by consultations with partners, and respect for state sovereignty," was discredited on June 8 when the US ambassador to Pakistan was summoned by the prime minister of that country angry over a US drone attack that killed nine people. "It was conveyed to the US chargé d'affaires that the government of Pakistan strongly condemns the drone strikes, which are a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said Pakistan's ministry of foreign affairs. "The importance of bringing an immediate end to drone strikes was emphasized."

"We act against terrorists who pose a continuing and imminent threat to the American people." Formerly the word

The parameters of discussion allowed by politeness and good manners or sanctioned by the police and courts simply cannot abide the objective appraisal of drone warfare that the times require

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These new “hunter-killer platforms” bear names like “Predators” and “Reapers” and may soon be supplanted by “Avengers” and “Stalkers.” The ordinance they deliver is a missile named “Hellfire.”
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“imminent” referred to something about to happen at any moment and using the generally accepted definition of the word one might construe in the president’s words a guarantee that drone strikes are used only to stop “terrorists” engaged in acts that would cause immediate harm to Americans. John Brennan, now director of the CIA, suggested in September 2011 that “a more flexible understanding of ‘imminence’ may be appropriate when dealing with terrorist groups.” This more flexible understanding of imminence justifies the assassination not only of those caught in the act, but also of targets who are suspected of having written something or said something to make someone think that they might have something to do with an attack on the US someday. A person who is caught on the drone’s video feed from 7,000 miles away as acting in a manner consistent with someone who might harm one day may now be eliminated as an imminent threat.

Referring to the killing of Anwar Awlaki, an American citizen in Yemen, the president assured us that “for the record, I do not believe it would be constitutional for the government to target and kill any US citizen – with a drone, or with a shotgun – without due process.” The general usage of the words “due process” would cause the misapprehension that the right of a citizen to have trial by jury before being executed is being reaffirmed here.

“This is simply not accurate,” says Attorney General Eric Holder. “‘Due process’ and ‘judicial process’ are not one and the same, particularly when it comes to national security. The Constitution guarantees due process, not judicial process.” The burden of “due process” can now be met when the president decides based on secret evidence that a citizen should die.

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Changing language

Drone technology is changing our language

beyond redefining terms like “imminence” and “due process.” We have progressed, too, beyond Orwellian euphemisms such as naming an intercontinental nuclear missile “Peacekeeper.” These new “hunter-killer platforms” bear names like “Predators” and “Reapers” and may soon be supplanted by “Avengers” and “Stalkers.” The ordinance they deliver is a missile named “Hellfire.”

In Iowa where I live, the Air National Guard unit based in Des Moines has replaced its F-16 fighter planes with a Reaper drone control center. This transformation was marked by changing the unit’s name from the “132nd Fighter Wing” to the “132nd Attack Wing.” This change is more than symbolic- a “fight” by definition has two sides and the word implies some kind of parity.

There is such a thing as a fair fight (of course the 132nd’s F-16s were used only on all but disarmed populations in places like Iraq and Panama) and a fight usually has some kind of resolution. An “attack” however, is just that. An attack is one-sided, something that a perpetrator inflicts on a victim. A fighter might sometimes be justified, an attacker, never. There is no “just attack” theory. The parsing out of innocent and guilty drone victims is in a sense a waste of time. All alike are victims.

George Kennan, might have seen this coming in a policy paper he wrote for the State Department in 1948. In order to preserve the global disparity of wealth post World War II (“We have about 50% of the world’s wealth, but only 6.3% of its population”) he suggested that “we should cease to talk about vague and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.” While the speech at the National Defense University was an embarrassment of idealistic slogans, it also used

chilling pragmatism to deal with straight power concepts.

“For me,” the president said on May 23, “and those in my chain of command, those deaths will haunt us as long as we live.” Those words had a truer ring a few days later spoken on NBC news by Brandon Bryant, an Air Force drone operator who confessed to being haunted by 1,600 deaths he took part in. Bryant admitted that his actions made him feel like a “heartless sociopath,” and he described one of his first kills, sitting in a chair at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada when his team fired on three men walking down a road in Afghanistan. It was night in Afghanistan, and he remembers watching the thermal image of one victim on his computer screen:

“I watch this guy bleed out and, I mean, the blood is hot.” Bryant watched the man

die and his image disappear as his body attained the ambient temperature of the ground. “I can see every little pixel, if I just close my eyes.” The remoteness of the drone warrior is no protection from the moral damage of war, and these people are victims as well, and it is on their behalf as well that we protest.

We cannot know the hearts of President Obama and those in his inner circle but it is not hard to wonder whether they are truly haunted by the deaths of those killed by drones at their commands. If they may not be haunted by their own consciences, perhaps the responsibility of haunting them falls to us. **CT**

Brian Terrell is a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence and lives on a Catholic Worker Farm in Maloy, Iowa

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Red lines and green lights

Israel is still angling for an attack on Syria and Iran, writes **Jonathan Cook**

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It looks as though Israel, while remaining largely mute about its interests in the civil war raging there, has been doing a great deal to pressure the White House into direct involvement in Syria
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President Barack Obama may have drawn his seemingly regretted “red line” around Syria’s chemical weapons, but it was neither he nor the international community that turned the spotlight on their use. That task fell to Israel.

It was an Israeli general who claimed in April that Damascus had used chemical weapons, forcing Obama into an embarrassing demurrer on his stated commitment to intervene should that happen.

According to the Israeli media, it was also Israel that provided the intelligence that blamed the Syrian president, Bashar Al Assad, for the latest chemical weapons attack, near Damascus on August 21, triggering the clamour for a US military response.

It is worth remembering that Obama’s supposed “dithering” on the question of military action has only been accentuated by Israel’s “daring” strikes on Syria – at least three since the start of the year.

It looks as though Israel, while remaining largely mute about its interests in the civil war raging there, has been doing a great deal to pressure the White House into direct involvement in Syria. That momentum appears to have been halted, for the time being at least, by the deal agreed by the US and Russia to dismantle Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal.

To understand the respective views of the White House and Israel on attacking Syria, one needs to revisit the US-led invasion of Iraq a

decade ago. Israel and its ideological twin in Washington, the neoconservatives, rallied to the cause of toppling Saddam Hussein, believing that it should be the prelude to an equally devastating blow against Iran.

Israel was keen to see its two chief regional enemies weakened simultaneously. Saddam’s Iraq had been the chief sponsor of Palestinian resistance against Israel. Iran, meanwhile, had begun developing a civilian nuclear programme that Israel feared could pave the way to an Iranian bomb, ending Israel’s regional monopoly on nuclear weapons.

The neocons carried out the first phase of the plan, destroying Iraq, but then ran up against domestic opposition that blocked implementation of the second stage: the break-up of Iran. The consequences are well known. As Iraq imploded into sectarian violence, Iran’s fortunes rose. Tehran strengthened its role as regional sponsor of resistance against Israel – or what became Washington’s new “axis of evil” – that included Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.

Israel and the US both regard Syria as the geographical “keystone” of that axis, as Israel’s outgoing ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, told the *Jerusalem Post* last month, and one that needs to be removed if Iran is to be isolated, weakened or attacked.

But Israel and the US drew different lessons from Iraq. Washington is now wary of its ground forces becoming bogged down again,

as well as fearful of reviving a cold war confrontation with Moscow. It prefers instead to rely on proxies to contain and exhaust the Syrian regime.

Israel, on the other hand, understands the danger of manoeuvring its patron into a showdown with Damascus without ensuring this time that Iran is tied into the plan. Toppling Assad alone would simply add emboldened jihadists to the troubles on its doorstep.

Given these assessments, Israel and the US have struggled to envision a realistic endgame that would satisfy them both. Obama fears setting the region, and possibly the world, ablaze with a direct attack on Iran; Israel is worried about stretching its patron's patience by openly pushing it into another catastrophic venture to guarantee its regional hegemony.

In his interview published recently by the *Jerusalem Post*, Michael Oren claimed that Israel had in fact been trying to oust Assad since the civil war erupted more than two years ago. He said Israel "always preferred the bad guys [jihadist groups] who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys [the Assad regime] who were backed by Iran."

That seems improbable. Although the Sunni jihadist groups, some with links to al-Qaeda, are not natural allies for either the Shia leaders of Iran or Hizbollah, they would be strongly hostile to Israel. Oren's comments, however, do indicate the degree to which Israel's strategic priorities are obsessively viewed through the prism of an attack on Iran.

More likely, Israel has focused on using the civil war as a way to box Assad into his heartlands. That way, he becomes a less useful ally to Hizbollah, Iran and Russia, while the civil war keeps both his regime and the opposition weak.

Israel would have preferred a US strike on Syria, a goal its lobbyists in Washington were briefly mobilised to achieve. But the intention was not to remove Assad but to assert what Danny Ayalon, a former deputy Israeli foreign minister, referred to as "American and Israeli deterrence" – code for signalling to Tehran

that it was being lined up as the next target.

That threat now looks empty. As Silvan Shalom, a senior government minister, observed: "If it is impossible to do anything against little Syria, then certainly it's not possible against big Iran."

But the new US-Russian deal to dispose of Syria's chemical weapons can probably be turned to Israel's advantage, so long as Israel prevents attention shifting to its own likely stockpiles. In the short term, Israel has reason to fear Assad's loss of control of his chemical weapons, with the danger that they pass either to the jihadists or to Hizbollah. The timetable for the weapons destruction should help to minimise those risks – in the words of one Israeli commentator, it is like Israel "winning the lottery".

But Israel also suspects that Damascus is likely to procrastinate on disarmament. In any case, efforts to locate and destroy its chemical weapons in the midst of a civil war will be lengthy and difficult.

And that may provide Israel with a way back in. Soon, as Israeli analysts are already pointing out, Syria will be hosting international inspectors searching for WMD, not unlike the situation in Iraq shortly before the US-led invasion of 2003. Israel, it can safely be assumed, will quietly meddle, trying to persuade the West that Assad is not cooperating and that Hizbollah and Iran are implicated.

In a vein Israel may mine later, a Syrian opposition leader, Selim Idris, claimed at the weekend that Damascus was seeking to conceal the extent of its stockpiles by passing them to Lebanon and Iraq.

Obama is not the only one to have set a red line. Last year, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, drew one on a cartoon bomb at the United Nations as he warned that the world faced an imminent existential threat from an Iranian nuclear weapon.

Israel still desperately wants its chief foe, Iran, crushed. And if it can find a way to lever the US into doing its dirty work, it will exploit the opening – regardless of whether such action ramps up the suffering in Syria. **CT**

Israel has focused on using the civil war as a way to box Assad into his heartlands. That way, he becomes a less useful ally to Hizbollah, Iran and Russia, while the civil war keeps both his regime and the opposition weak

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

Drown? Or live to write another day?

Darrel Bristow-Bovey on the day he almost became a hero

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Ever since I was a small boy roaming the wilds of my backyard I've played out moments of crisis and derring-do – hold-ups and Hindenburgs and airplane hijackings
.....

As I walked near my Cape Town home, carrying books from the second-hand store and thinking about my flight in the morning, I noticed a man in the sea.

It was a bright day and a low tide and the sea was on the far side of a wide shelf of black rocks that are usually covered. The man had fallen from his kayak and clung to the side of it. The sea was so blue and the man so near shore you couldn't imagine he was in serious danger. The water was very clear; you could see the dark kelp beds and the lines of clear turquoise water above the sandy bottom and the bands of dark purple and deeper blue beyond.

I've always hoped I'd do well in an emergency. Ever since I was a small boy roaming the wilds of my backyard I've played out moments of crisis and derring-do – hold-ups and Hindenburgs and airplane hijackings – rehearsing how, while others gawped and shrieked, I might spring into action like James Bond or a panther. So I'd like to say that when I saw the man in the water I was ready to go, but actually I stood wondering why he was swimming when he had a perfectly good kayak. I wondered if he wasn't cold. Then I wondered if I should do anything. But it would be embarrassing to do something if he didn't want any doing done. It's good to be a hero, but you don't want to intrude.

I might still be standing there like a columnist at a cocktail party if a splendid woman hadn't run past me, eyes on the ocean. She wore a jacket with a reflective stripe so I assumed she knew what she was doing.

We ran down the stairs from the sea wall and balanced across the sharp ridges and rock pools towards the sea. There were anemones and whelks in the pools and I tried not to stand on them. She was attached to the NSRI and lived nearby and someone had called her.

We reached the edge of the rocks. The man had been in the water for an hour. It is cold in the Atlantic. He let go of the kayak and struggled his way through kelp beds and breakers.

I called: "Are you okay?"

He was too tired to answer. He wasn't far away but to reach him you would have to jump into the sea and make your own way through the rocks and currents.

"I think he's okay," I said. The woman was taking off her jeans. You can't let a woman strip to her underwear and go into the sea on her own, but first I had to find a dry place to put my books and somewhere to wedge my phone.

I remembered times I might have died: an overturned car in the Karoo; a head-on collision in Parktown North with a stranger I later dated; a rugby fan pointing a gun at my head on the M1; a mishap in the moun-

tains of Turkey. It must happen every day on the road or in our bodies without our realising. Each moment our heart doesn't stop beating is another lucky escape.

Once, many years ago, I was in the sea at sunset in winter and the water was too cold and the rip too strong. I couldn't get back and I was very sure I would drown. A man swam out to me but then he couldn't get back in either. He was a lifesaver on holiday from England, and I apologised for being the cause of his death. "S'okay," he said, a little insincerely. Finally people linked hands to form a human chain that reached us and pulled us in. When I remember that day I remember the loneliness of dying so near shore while the world carries on. Instead I should remember the chain of hands.

We helped the man out and he was stunned with cold and tiredness. He shook but he was all right. I kept wanting to touch

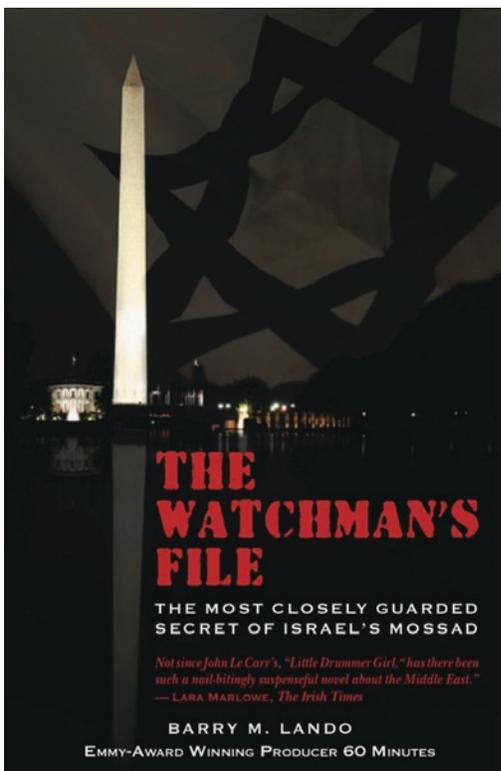
him, like a talisman: I wanted to ask him what he now knew. Of course, he knew nothing. Watching someone come clawing back across that thin line is more meaningful than doing it yourself.

By the time we reached the promenade there were other NSRI members, and more arriving. I already donate each month to the NSRI; now I'm glad I do.

We looked back from the sea wall. From that elevation the sea looked perfectly calm. The clear channels were like the roads of a sunken city. Close to where he'd nearly died, a whale blew. "Wow," said the man. "A whale."
CT

Darrel Bristow-Bovey is a columnist for South Africa's Times newspaper, where this was first published. He is the author of "But I Digress . . .", "I Moved Your Cheese" and "The Naked Bachelor"

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