

ON BOARD THE GAZA BOAT | KEVIN NEISH
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'WE AINT FOUND SHIT!' | SCOTT RITTER

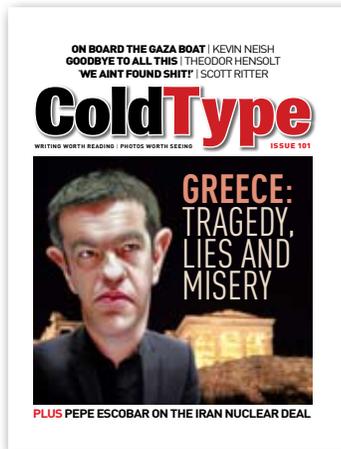
ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 101



PLUS PEPE ESCOBAR ON THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL



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ColdType

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Greece: not just a tragedy, but also a lie

Tsipras and Varoufakis have presented themselves neither as radicals nor 'leftists' nor even honest social democrats, writes **John Pilger**



A big No! to Europe's bankers at a demonstration in Dublin, Ireland.

Photo: Des Byrne Street Photography, Dublin

An historic betrayal has consumed Greece. Having set aside the mandate of the Greek electorate, the Syriza government has willfully ignored July's landslide "No" vote and secretly agreed a raft of repressive, impoverishing measures in return for a "bailout" that means sinister foreign control and a warning to the world.

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has pushed through parliament a proposal to cut at least 13 billion euros from the public purse – 4 bil-

lion euros more than the "austerity" figure rejected overwhelmingly by the majority of the Greek population in a referendum on July 5.

These reportedly include a 50 per cent increase in the cost of healthcare for pensioners, almost 40 per cent of whom live in poverty; deep cuts in public sector wages; the complete privatization of public facilities such as airports and ports; a rise in value added tax to 23 per cent, now applied to the Greek islands where people struggle to eke

The bailout means sinister foreign control and is a warning to the world

For a small country such as Greece, the euro is a colonial currency: a tether to a capitalist ideology so extreme that even the Pope pronounces it “intolerable” and “the dung of the devil”

out a living. There is more to come.

“Anti-austerity party sweeps to stunning victory”, declared a *Guardian* headline on January 25. “Radical leftists” the paper called Tsipras and his impressively-educated comrades. They wore open neck shirts, and the finance minister rode a motorbike and was described as a “rock star of economics”. It was a façade. They were not radical in any sense of that clichéd label, neither were they “anti austerity”.

For six months Tsipras and the recently discarded finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, shuttled between Athens and Brussels, Berlin and the other centres of European money power. Instead of social justice for Greece, they achieved a new indebtedness, a deeper impoverishment that would merely replace a systemic rottenness based on the theft of tax revenue by the Greek super-wealthy – in accordance with European “neo-liberal” values – and cheap, highly profitable loans from those now seeking Greece’s scalp.

Greece’s debt, reports an audit by the Greek parliament, “is illegal, illegitimate and odious”. Proportionally, it is less than 30 per cent that of the debit of Germany, its major creditor. It is less than the debt of European banks whose “bailout” in 2007-8 was barely controversial and unpunished.

For a small country such as Greece, the euro is a colonial currency: a tether to a capitalist ideology so extreme that even the Pope pronounces it “intolerable” and “the dung of the devil”. The euro is to Greece what the US dollar is to remote territories in the Pacific, whose poverty and servility is guaranteed by their dependency.

In their travels to the court of the mighty in Brussels and Berlin, Tsipras and Varoufakis presented themselves neither as radicals nor “leftists” nor even honest social democrats, but as two slightly upstart supplicants in their pleas and demands. Without underestimating the hostility they faced, it is fair to say they displayed no political courage. More than once, the Greek people found out about their “secret austerity plans” in leaks to the

media: such as a 30 June letter published in the *Financial Times*, in which Tsipras promised the heads of the EU, the European Central Bank and the IMF to accept their basic, most vicious demands – which he has now accepted.

When the Greek electorate voted “no” on 5 July to this very kind of rotten deal, Tsipras said, “Come Monday and the Greek government will be at the negotiating table after the referendum with better terms for the Greek people”. Greeks had not voted for “better terms”. They had voted for justice and for sovereignty, as they had done on January 25.

The day after the January election a truly democratic and, yes, radical government would have stopped every euro leaving the country,Photo: Ben Folley repudiated the “illegal and odious” debt – as Argentina did successfully – and expedited a plan to leave the crippling Eurozone. But there was no plan. There was only a willingness to be “at the table” seeking “better terms”.

The true nature of Syriza has been seldom examined and explained. To the foreign media it is no more than “leftist” or “far left” or “hardline” – the usual misleading spray. Some of Syriza’s international supporters have reached, at times, levels of cheer leading reminiscent of the rise of Barack Obama. Few have asked: Who are these “radicals”? What do they believe in?

In 2013, Yanis Varoufakis wrote: “Should we welcome this crisis of European capitalism as an opportunity to replace it with a better system? Or should we be so worried about it as to embark upon a campaign for stabilising capitalism? To me, the answer is clear. Europe’s crisis is far less likely to give birth to a better alternative to capitalism... I bow to the criticism that I have campaigned on an agenda founded on the assumption that the left was, and remains, squarely defeated... Yes, I would love to put forward [a] radical agenda. But, no, I am not prepared to commit the [error of the British Labour Party following Thatcher’s victory]... What good



Ireland, a previous victim of Europe's austerity campaign marches in support of Greece. Photo: Des Byrne Street Photography, Dublin

did we achieve in Britain in the early 1980s by promoting an agenda of socialist change that British society scorned while falling headlong into Thatcher's neoliberal trip? Precisely none. What good will it do today to call for a dismantling of the Eurozone, of the European Union itself...?"

Varoufakis omits all mention of the Social Democratic Party that split the Labour vote and led to Blairism. In suggesting people in Britain "scorned socialist change" – when they were given no real opportunity to bring about that change – he echoes Blair.

The leaders of Syriza are revolutionaries of a kind – but their revolution is the perverse, familiar appropriation of social democratic and parliamentary movements by liberals groomed to comply with neo-liberal drivel and a social engineering whose authentic face is that of Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany's finance minister, an imperial thug. Like the Labour Party in Britain and its equivalents among former social

democratic parties such as the Labor Party in Australia, still describing themselves as "liberal" or even "left", Syriza is the product of an affluent, highly privileged, educated middle class, "schooled in postmodernism", as Alex Lantier wrote.

For them, class is the unmentionable, let alone an enduring struggle, regardless of the reality of the lives of most human beings. Syriza's luminaries are well-groomed; they lead not the resistance that ordinary people crave, as the Greek electorate has so bravely demonstrated, but "better terms" of a venal status quo that corrals and punishes the poor. When merged with "identity politics" and its insidious distractions, the consequence is not resistance, but subservience. "Mainstream" political life in Britain exemplifies this.

This is not inevitable, a done deal, if we wake up from the long, postmodern coma and reject the myths and deceptions of those who claim to represent us, and fight. **CT**

Their revolution is the perverse, familiar appropriation of social democratic and parliamentary movements by liberals groomed to comply with neo-liberal drivel

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John Pilger
 is working on
 a new movie,
 "The Coming
 War"

Dispensing with democracy

How has democracy fared in the place where it was supposedly born? Not well, according to **Danny Katch**

Greece's debt crisis didn't come about because millions of Greeks borrowed money from their buddies across Europe, bought a bunch of nice stuff with it, and then refused to pay back the debt

Ancient Greece is said to have introduced democracy to the world some 2,500 years ago. Now the world is trying to show modern Greece that it's been wrong all along.

Last January, when the Greeks elected the radical left party SYRIZA into power, with its platform of resisting the devastating austerity pushed by the authorities in Europe, they were portrayed by international political and business elites as foolishly attempting to resist the natural laws of capitalism.

As is so often the case in our world, we were meant to view the crisis in Greece in purely economic terms of debt repayment, rather than raise democratic questions about who decides which debts are paid and by whom – or whether some project is worth going into debt for in the first place, for that matter.

What SYRIZA's election did was to expose the bankers' laws and rules as not natural at all – a dangerous message for which Europe's leaders seem determined to punish both the party and the people who elected it with economic devastation for decades to come.

It's important to clarify from the beginning that Greece's debt crisis didn't come about because millions of Greeks borrowed money from their buddies across Europe, bought a bunch of nice stuff with it, and then refused to pay back their hardworking friends abroad.

Rather, the bankers in Germany, France and other powerful countries made lots of loans

and investments – some solid, some shady – in many smaller countries until enough of the shady bank loans triggered a global financial crisis in 2008. Greece was the country in Europe with the biggest debt in relationship to the country's gross domestic product – though it wasn't number one by that much.

On its own, Greece's debt was actually quite manageable, but as Mark Blyth explained in *Foreign Affairs*, the bankers feared it could be the loose thread that unraveled a much larger web of financial lies across the continent:

“The Greek deficit [in 2010] was a rounding error, not a reason to panic. Unless, of course, the folks holding Greek debts, those big banks in the eurozone core, had, over the prior decade, grown to twice the size (in terms of assets) of – and with operational leverage ratios (assets divided by liabilities) twice as high as – their “too big to fail” American counterparts, which they had done. In such an over-leveraged world, if Greece defaulted, those banks would need to sell other similar sovereign assets to cover the losses. But all those sell contracts hitting the market at once would trigger a bank run throughout the bond markets of the eurozone that could wipe out core European banks.”

In other words, for the past five years, the rich bankers of Europe have been attempting to appease the gods of capital by offering up the ordinary people of Greece as a human

sacrifice. Wages are down 20 percent while taxes have risen by seven times – all in return for billions of dollars in bailouts that mostly go straight to French and German banks.

SYRIZA won a historic election in January – a meteoric rise for what was a small left electoral coalition only a few years before – because it promised to reject this brutal program of austerity.

But the party leadership around Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras quickly turned its attention to talks with the European lenders, under the mistaken impression that the strong mandate they had been given by Greek voters would somehow impress European capitalists – rather than enrage them.

Like clever foxes negotiating with a concrete wall, Tsipras and his Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis made concession after concession on SYRIZA’s campaign promises, waiting in vain for Germany and the European and international financial institutions – known as the “troika” – to meet them halfway.

Then at the end of June, something remarkable happened. Desperate to change the terms of the game, Tsipras announced that he would ask the Greek people to vote for or against the latest EU proposals for austerity in a national referendum on July 5.

All the country’s political forces mobilized – for the first time since the national election five months before, millions of Greeks would have a say in their own fate – were they for or against the austerity measures. When 61 percent voted “Oxi!” (“No!”), it was a decisive call for SYRIZA to continue – or restart – the fight against austerity.

The Greek referendum was a startling moment for people around the world as well, a glimpse of what something approaching ac-



Make the bosses and bankers pay!

Photo: Ben Foley

tual democracy looks like, instead of the typical capitalist version of voting once in a while for which face you want to be getting the bad news from for the next few years.

Among ruling class circles in Europe, the reaction to Oxi! was rage. Tsipras had “torn down the last bridges over which Europe and Greece might have been able to move towards a compromise,” said Germany’s deputy chancellor (and leader of the Social Democrats) Sigmar Gabriel, with his “rejection of the rules of the game of the eurozone.”

That’s right. Just like an exclusive country club that posts multiple signs forbidding running, diving or splashing in the pool area, the eurozone tried to erect a “No voting” sign across the continent. It was a variation on the same message delivered ever since the people

The rich bankers of Europe have been attempting to appease the gods of capital by offering up the ordinary people of Greece as a human sacrifice

Among the many things at stake today in the battle for Greece is the question of democracy under the harsh conditions of 21st century capitalism

of France and the Netherlands decisively voted down a proposed European Constitution in 2005.

That inconvenience forced European rulers to go to the trouble of rewriting the Constitution as the Treaty of Lisbon, which they claimed was merely a revision of previous European treaties and therefore not subject to popular vote.

The referendum called by Tsipras was non-binding – as later events would depressingly prove – but it nonetheless showed the explosive power of democracy, bringing to mind the truth of Frederick Engels’ observation in “The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State:”

“Universal suffrage is thus the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the modern state, but that is enough. On the day when the thermometer of universal suffrage shows boiling point among the workers, they as well as the capitalists will know where they stand.”

Engels’ point was that while democracy is both a tool and an aim for socialists, capitalism is a fundamentally undemocratic economic order that can’t be elected out of existence, but will need to be overthrown by workers acting above and beyond the ballot box. Alexis Tsipras and his co-thinkers in the SYRIZA leadership are committed to different version of socialism, based on the strategy of gradually winning national power through parliament – and more recently, wining continental power via the European Union.

That’s why almost immediately after the referendum, Tsipras announced that he was going back to negotiations and was willing to accept most of the harsh measures that Greeks had just decisively voted down in the referendum that he had called.

In effect, Tsipras decided to use the mass democracy of Oxi! as a bargaining chip in negotiations to try to remain in the far less democratic club of the European Union.

The EU responded to the referendum as it did to SYRIZA’s election in January, calling for even harsher austerity measures – including forcing the Greek parliament to pass a series of laws undoing every SYRIZA promise and demanding that 50 billion euros in Greek assets be turned over to a fund controlled by EU.

Varoufakis, who had been forced to step down as finance minister, compared these demands to the 1967 military coup that installed a military dictatorship. “In the coup d’état, the choice of weapon used in order to bring down democracy then was the tanks,” he said. “Well, this time, it was the banks.”

What was the point of the referendum if the will of the people was going to be so quickly ignored? That question is being asked by millions of Greeks as well as their supporters around the world.

But the referendum won’t have been in vain if organizations on the Greek left – inside and outside SYRIZA – are able to mobilize opposition to the new austerity program, both in parliament and in the streets, workplaces and campuses of Greece.

The democracy practiced by Pericles and the Athenians of ancient Greece was real, but very limited, resting on an economic foundation of slave labor. In every society since that was dominated by a minority class, democracy has been at best an ideal that is never close to fulfilled.

Among the many things at stake today in the battle for Greece is the question of democracy under the harsh conditions of 21st century capitalism. And we certainly know, from observing the behavior of the European political and business elite, which side values democracy. The rulers of the “free” market system don’t even bother to pretend they care about it any more. **CT**

Danny Katch is the author of “Socialism... Seriously: A Brief Guide to Human Liberation”. This essay originally appeared at <http://socialistworker.org>

We are all Greeks now

Democracy is as dead in the US as it is in Greece. There's only one way to change the system. And that's to fight it, argues **Chris Hedges**

The poor and the working class in the United States know what it is to be Greek. They know underemployment and unemployment. They know life without a pension. They know existence on a few dollars a day. They know gas and electricity being turned off because of unpaid bills. They know the crippling weight of debt. They know being sick and unable to afford medical care. They know the state seizing their meager assets, a process known in the United States as “civil asset forfeiture,” which has permitted American police agencies to confiscate more than \$3 billion in cash and property. They know the profound despair and abandonment that come when schools, libraries, neighborhood health clinics, day care services, roads, bridges, public buildings and assistance programs are neglected or closed. They know the financial elites’ hijacking of democratic institutions to impose widespread misery in the name of austerity. They, like the Greeks, know what it is to be abandoned.

The Greeks and the US working poor endure the same deprivations because they are being assaulted by the same system – corporate capitalism. There are no internal constraints on corporate capitalism. And the few external constraints that existed have been removed. Corporate capitalism, manipulating the world’s most powerful financial institutions, including the Eurogroup, the World

Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Federal Reserve, does what it is designed to do: It turns everything, including human beings and the natural world, into commodities to be exploited until exhaustion or collapse. In the extraction process, labor unions are broken, regulatory agencies are gutted, laws are written by corporate lobbyists to legalize fraud and empower global monopolies, and public utilities are privatized.

Secret deals

Secret trade agreements – which even elected officials who view the documents are not allowed to speak about – empower corporate oligarchs to amass even greater power and accrue even greater profits at the expense of workers. To swell its profits, corporate capitalism plunders, represses and drives into bankruptcy individuals, cities, states and governments. It ultimately demolishes the structures and markets that make capitalism possible. But this is of little consolation for those who endure its evil. By the time it slays itself it will have left untold human misery in its wake.

The Greek government kneels before the bankers of Europe begging for mercy because it knows that if it leaves the eurozone, the international banking system will do to Greece what it did to the socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1973 in Chile; it will, as Richard Nixon promised to do in Chile, “make the

There are no internal constraints on corporate capitalism. And the few external constraints that existed have been removed

The cost of being shot with a stun gun (\$26) or of probation services (\$35 to \$100 a month) or of an electronic ankle bracelet (\$11 a month) is vacuumed out of the pockets of the poor

economy scream.” The bankers will destroy Greece. If this means the Greeks can no longer get medicine – Greece owes European drug makers 1 billion euros – so be it. If this means food shortages – Greece imports thousands of tons of food from Europe a year – so be it. If this means oil and gas shortages – Greece imports 99 percent of its oil and gas – so be it. The bankers will carry out economic warfare until the current Greek government is ousted and corporate political puppets are back in control.

Human life is of no concern to corporate capitalists. The suffering of the Greeks, like the suffering of ordinary Americans, is very good for the profit margins of financial institutions such as Goldman Sachs. It was, after all, Goldman Sachs – which shoved subprime mortgages down the throats of families it knew could never pay the loans back, sold the subprime mortgages as investments to pension funds and then bet against them – that orchestrated complex financial agreements with Greece, many of them secret. These agreements doubled the debt Greece owes under derivative deals and allowed the old Greek government to mask its real debt to keep borrowing. And when Greece imploded, Goldman Sachs headed out the door with suitcases full of cash.

Trickling up

The system of unfettered capitalism is designed to callously extract money from the most vulnerable and funnel it upward to the elites. This is seen in the mounting fines and fees used to cover shortfalls in city and state budgets. Corporate capitalism seeks to privatize all aspects of government service, from education to intelligence gathering. The US Postal Service appears to be next. Parents already must pay hundreds of dollars for their public-school children to take school buses, go to music or art classes and participate in sports or other activities. Fire departments, ambulance services, the national parks system are all slated to become fodder for corporate profit. It is the death of

the civil society.

Criminal justice is primarily about revenue streams for city and state governments in the United States rather than about justice or rehabilitation. The poor are arrested and fined for minor infractions in Ferguson, Mo., and elsewhere; for not mowing their lawns; for putting their feet on seats of New York City subway cars. If they cannot pay the fines, as many cannot, they go to jail. In jail they are often charged room and board. And if they can't pay this new bill they go to jail again. It is a game of circular and never-ending extortion of the poor. Fines that are unpaid accrue interest and generate warrants for arrest. Poor people often end up owing thousands of dollars for parking or traffic violations.

Fascist and communist firing squads sometimes charged the victim's family for the bullets used in the execution. In corporate capitalism, too, the abusers extract payment; often the money goes to private corporations that carry out probation services or prison and jail administration. The cost of being shot with a stun gun (\$26) or of probation services (\$35 to \$100 a month) or of an electronic ankle bracelet (\$11 a month) is vacuumed out of the pockets of the poor. And all this is happening in what will one day be seen as the good times. Wait until the financial house of cards collapses again – what is happening in China is not a good sign – and Wall Street runs for cover. Then America will become Greece on steroids.

“We are a nation that has turned its welfare system into a criminal system,” write Karen Dolan and Jodi L. Carr in an Institute for Policy Studies report titled “The Poor Get Prison.” “We criminalize life-sustaining activities of people too poor to afford shelter. We incarcerate more people than any other nation in the world. And we institute policies that virtually bar them for life from participating in society once they have done their time. We have allowed the resurgence of debtors' prisons. We've created a second-tier public education system for poor children and black and Latino children that disproportionately criminalizes

their behavior and sets them early onto the path of incarceration and lack of access to assistance and opportunity.”

The corporate dismantling of civil society is nearly complete in Greece. It is far advanced in the United States. We, like the Greeks, are undergoing a political war waged by the world’s oligarchs. No one elected them. They ignore public opinion. And, as in Greece, if a government defies the international banking community it is targeted for execution. The banks do not play by the rules of democracy.

Our politicians are corporate employees. And if you get dewy-eyed about the possibility of the US having its first woman president, remember that it was Hillary Clinton’s husband who decimated manufacturing jobs with the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement and then went on to destroy welfare with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which halted federal cash aid programs and imposed time-limited, restrictive state block grants. Under President Bill Clinton, most welfare recipients – and 70 percent of those recipients were children – were dropped from the rolls. The prison-industrial complex exploded in size as its private corporations swallowed up surplus, unemployed labor, making \$40,000 or more a year from each person held in a cage. The population of federal and state prisons combined rose by 673,000 under Clinton. He, along with Ronald Reagan, set the foundations for the Grecification of the United States.

The destruction of Greece, like the destruction of America, by the big banks and financial firms is not, as the bankers claim, about austerity or imposing rational expenditures or balanced budgets. It is not about responsible or good government. It is a vicious form of class warfare. It is profoundly anti-democratic. It is about forming nations of impoverished, disempowered serfs and a rapacious elite of all-powerful corporate oligarchs, backed by the most sophisticated security and surveillance apparatus in human history and a militarized police that shoots unarmed citizens with reckless abandon. The laws and rules it

imposes on the poor are, as Barbara Ehrenreich has written, little more than “organized sadism.”

Corporate profit is God. It does not matter who suffers. In Greece 40 percent of children live in poverty, there is a 25 percent unemployment rate and the unemployment figure for those between the ages of 15 and 24 is nearly 50 percent. And it will only get worse.

The economic and political ideology that convinced us that organized human behavior should be determined by the dictates of the global marketplace was a con game. We were the suckers. The promised prosperity from trickle-down economics and the free market instead concentrated wealth among a few and destroyed the working and the middle classes along with all vestiges of democracy. Corrupt governments, ignoring the common good and the consent of the governed, abetted this pillage. The fossil fuel industry was licensed to ravage the ecosystem, threatening the viability of the human species, while being handed lavish government subsidies. None of this makes sense.

The mandarins that maintain this system cannot respond rationally in our time of crisis. They are trained only to make the system of exploitation work. They are blinded by their insatiable greed and neoliberal ideology, which posits that controlling inflation, privatizing public assets and removing trade barriers are the sole economic priorities. They are steering us over a cliff.

We will not return to a rational economy or restore democracy until these global speculators are stripped of power. This will happen only if the streets of major cities in Europe and the United States are convulsed with mass protests. The tyranny of these financial elites knows no limits. They will impose ever greater suffering and repression until we submit or revolt. I prefer the latter. But we don’t have much time. **CT**

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Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, writes a regular Monday column for Truthdig – <http://truthdig.com>

The economic and political ideology that convinced us that organized human behavior should be determined by the dictates of the global marketplace was a con game. We were the suckers

Disinventing democracy

The assault on Greece is just the latest episode in a long history of shutting down choice on behalf of the financial elite, writes **George Monbiot**

Like most other central banks, the European Central Bank enjoys “political independence.” This does not mean that it is free from politics; only that it is free from democracy

Greece might be financially bankrupt; the troika is politically bankrupt. Those who persecute this nation wield illegitimate, undemocratic powers: powers of the kind now afflicting us all.

Consider the International Monetary Fund. The distribution of power here was perfectly stitched up: IMF decisions require an 85% majority, and the US holds 17% of the votes. It’s controlled by the rich, and governs the poor on their behalf. It’s now doing to Greece what it has done to one poor nation after another, from Argentina to Zambia. Its structural adjustment programmes have forced scores of elected governments to dismantle public spending, destroying health, education and the other means by which the wretched of the earth might improve their lives.

The same programme is imposed regardless of circumstance: every country the IMF colonises must place the control of inflation ahead of other economic objectives; immediately remove its barriers to trade and the flow of capital; liberalise its banking system; reduce government spending on everything except debt repayments; and privatise the assets which can be sold to foreign investors.

Using the threat of its self-fulfilling prophecy (it warns the financial markets that countries which don’t submit to its demands are doomed), it has forced governments to aban-

don their progressive policies. Almost single-handedly, it engineered the 1997 Asian financial crisis: by forcing governments to remove their capital controls, it opened currencies to attack by financial speculators. Only countries such as Malaysia and China, which refused to cave in, escaped the crisis.

Consider the European Central Bank. Like most other central banks, it enjoys “political independence”. This does not mean that it is free from politics; only that it is free from democracy. It is ruled instead by the financial sector, whose interests it is constitutionally obliged to champion, through its inflation target of around 2%. Ever mindful of where power lies, it has exceeded this mandate, inflicting deflation and epic unemployment on poorer members of the eurozone.

The Maastricht treaty, establishing the European Union and the euro, was built on a lethal delusion: a belief that the ECB could provide the only common economic governance that monetary union required. It arose from an extreme version of market fundamentalism: if inflation was kept low, its authors imagined, the magic of the markets would resolve all other social and economic problems, making politics redundant. Those sober, suited, serious people, who now pronounce themselves the only adults in the room, turn out to be demented utopian fantasists, votaries of a fanatical economic cult.

All this is but a recent chapter in the long

tradition of subordinating human welfare to financial power. The austerity now imposed on Greece, brutal as it is, is mild by comparison to earlier versions. Take, for example, the Irish and Indian famines, both exacerbated (in the second case caused) by the doctrine then known as *laissez-faire*, but which we now know as market fundamentalism or neoliberalism.

Exploiting drought

In Ireland's case, one eighth of the population was killed – one could almost say murdered – in the late 1840s, partly by the British refusal to distribute food, to prohibit the export of grain or to provide effective poor relief. Such policies offended the holy doctrine that nothing should stay the invisible hand

When drought struck India in 1877 and 1878, the British imperial government insisted on exporting record amounts of grain, precipitating a famine that killed millions. The Anti-Charitable Contributions Act of 1877 prohibited “at the pain of imprisonment private relief donations that potentially interfered with the market fixing of grain prices.” The only relief permitted was forced work in labour camps, in which less food was provided than to the inmates of Buchenwald. Monthly mortality in these camps in 1877 was equivalent to an annual rate of 94%.

As Karl Polanyi argued in “The Great Transformation,” the gold standard – the self-regulating system at the heart of *laissez-faire* economics – prevented governments in the 19th and early 20th centuries from raising public spending or stimulating employment. It obliged them to keep the majority poor, while the rich enjoyed a gilded age. Few means of containing public discontent were available, other than sucking wealth from the colonies and promoting aggressive nationalism. This was one of the factors that contributed to the First World War. The resumption of the gold standard by many nations after the war exacerbated the Great Depression, preventing central banks from increasing

the money supply and funding deficits. You might have hoped that European governments would remember the results.

Today, equivalents to the gold standard – inflexible commitments to austerity – abound. In December 2011, the European Council agreed a new fiscal compact, imposing on all members of the eurozone a rule that “government budgets shall be balanced or in surplus”. This rule, which had to be transcribed into national law, would “contain an automatic correction mechanism that shall be triggered in the event of deviation.” This helps to explain the seigniorial horror with which the troika's unelected technocrats have greeted the resurgence of democracy in Greece. Hadn't they ensured that choice was illegal? Such diktats mean that the only possible democratic outcome in Europe is now the collapse of the euro: like it or not, all else is slow-burning tyranny.

This is hard for those of us on the left to admit, but Margaret Thatcher saved the UK from this despotism. European monetary union, she predicted, would ensure that the poorer countries must not be bailed out, “which would devastate their inefficient economies.”

But only, it seems, for her party to supplant it with a homegrown tyranny. George Osborne's proposed legal commitment to a budgetary surplus exceeds that of the eurozone rule. Labour's promised budget responsibility lock, though milder, had a similar intent. In all cases, governments deny themselves the possibility of change. In other words, they pledge to thwart democracy.

So it has been for the past two centuries, with the exception of the 30-year Keynesian respite. The crushing of political choice is not a side effect of this utopian belief system but a necessary component. Neoliberalism is inherently incompatible with democracy, as people will always rebel against the austerity and fiscal tyranny it prescribes. Something has to give, and it must be the people. This is the true road to serfdom: disinventing democracy on behalf of the elite. **CT**

The assault on Greece is just the latest episode in a long history of shutting down choice on behalf of the financial elite

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George Monbiot's book “*Feral*” was recently released in paperback format. This article was originally published in the *Guardian* newspaper

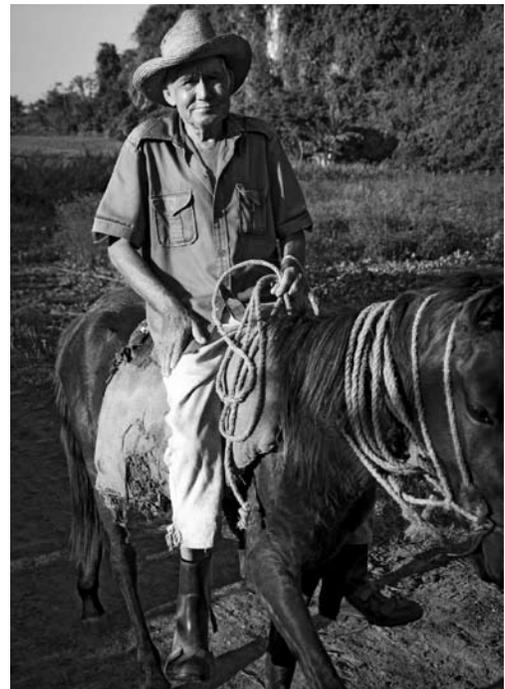


Cowboys relax after a hard day's work in the hot Cuban fields

Goodbye to all this

Theodor Hensolt is witness to what may be the last days of old style farming in Cuba

obbyists for US corporate agriculture have been working for decades to repeal sanctions against Cuba, winning a partial lift of the embargo in 2000 for limited “humanitarian” exports of American produce. Last month one of Big Agra’s assets in the US Senate, Republican Jerry Moran of Kansas, co-sponsored a bill with Maine’s independent senator, Angus King, to almost totally lift the embargo, complaining that the Cuban market, which the US Department of Agriculture estimates to be worth more than a billion dollars a year,



Back to an older, more relaxed, way of life.



Before the embargo, machines did the heavy work on Cuba's farms, then the farming reverted to simpler, older methods.



Canadian and American tourists might romanticize their picturesque lives, most Cuban farmworkers are unlikely to share that romantic vision after decades of manual labor under the hot tropical sun

Fresh chicken for sale. Free range, no antibiotics.



Above: Feeding time at the farm. Below: Cuban fuel truck.

Farmers in Cuba's state-run system are used to either selling to one buyer at a low fixed price or working for one company at a low fixed wage



is open to the rest of the world, but closed to US businesses.

These efforts are backed by corporate lobbies and bankrolled by multinational agricultural giants such as Cargill. The political stars are all lined up for the falling of the sanctions that helped freeze Cuban agricultural culture in time, opening the door for Cuban *campesinos* to be integrated into the global agricul-

tural economy.

Whatever happens, one thing is certain: life for Cuban agricultural workers will never be the same. However, unlike other countries where corporate monopolies overran small farming long ago, farmers in Cuba's state-run system are used to either selling to one buyer at a low fixed price or working for one company at a low fixed wage.



Above: Back-breaking work in the hot fields. Below: Force-drying cereal on a public street.



Their future depends on how well the economy is managed to benefit its workers rather than Wall Street investors and an emerging Cuban elite

And, while Canadian and American tourists might romanticize the picturesque lives of Cuban *campesinos*, seeing them as harkening back to a simpler, less stressful time, most Cuban farmworkers are unlikely to share that romantic vision after decades of manual labor under the hot tropical sun.

Whether their working conditions improve or get worse as Monsanto and their ilk move

in is dependent on how effectively the Cuban political system can fight the inevitable corruption that comes with corporate cash; and if Cuba's emerging new agricultural economy is managed to benefit its workers, rather than Wall Street investors and an emerging Cuban elite. If events in the rest of the world is anything to go by, their future looks grim.

Michael I. Niman

Theodor Hensolt is a retired nuclear engineer from Dormitz in Germany.

Michael i. Niman is a professor of journalism and critical media studies at SUNY Buffalo State

Freedom or the slaughterhouse?

John W. Whitehead examines the American police state – from A to Z

Citizens seem content to buy into a carefully constructed, benevolent vision of life in America that bears little resemblance to the gritty, pain-etched reality

“Who needs direct repression when one can convince the chicken to walk freely into the slaughterhouse?” – Philosopher Slavoj Žižek

Despite the best efforts of some to sound the alarm, the nation is being locked down into a militarized, mechanized, hypersensitive, legalistic, self-righteous, goose-stepping antithesis of every principle upon which this nation was founded.

All the while, the nation’s citizens seem content to buy into a carefully constructed, benevolent vision of life in America that bears little resemblance to the gritty, pain-etched reality that plagues those unfortunate enough to not belong to the rarefied elite.

For those whose minds have been short-circuited into believing the candy-coated propaganda peddled by the politicians, here is an A-to-Z, back-to-the-basics primer of what life in the United States of America is really all about.

A is for the AMERICAN POLICE STATE. As I point out in my book “Battlefield America: The War on the American People”, a police state “is characterized by bureaucracy, secrecy, perpetual wars, a nation of suspects, militarization, surveillance, widespread police presence, and a citizenry with little recourse against police actions.”

B is for our battered BILL OF RIGHTS. In the cop culture that is America today, where you can be kicked, punched, tasered, shot, intimidated, harassed, stripped, searched, brutalized, terrorized, wrongfully arrested, and even killed by a police officer, and that officer is rarely held accountable for violating your rights, the Bill of Rights doesn’t amount to much.

C is for CIVIL ASSET FORFEITURE. The latest governmental scheme to deprive Americans of their liberties – namely, the right to property – is being carried out under the guise of civil asset forfeiture, a government practice wherein government agents (usually the police) seize private property they “suspect” may be connected to criminal activity. Then, whether or not any crime is actually proven to have taken place, the government keeps the citizen’s property.

D is for DRONES. It is estimated that at least 30,000 drones will be airborne in American airspace by 2020, part of an \$80 billion industry. Although some drones will be used for benevolent purposes, many will also be equipped with lasers, tasers and scanning devices, among other weapons.

E is for ELECTRONIC CONCENTRATION CAMP. In the electronic concentration camp, as I have dubbed the surveillance state, all

aspects of a person's life are policed by government agents and all citizens are suspects, their activities monitored and regulated, their movements tracked, their communications spied upon, and their lives, liberties and pursuit of happiness dependent on the government's say-so.

F is for FUSION CENTERS. Fusion centers, data collecting agencies spread throughout the country and aided by the National Security Agency, serve as a clearinghouse for information shared between state, local and federal agencies. These fusion centers constantly monitor our communications, everything from our internet activity and web searches to text messages, phone calls and emails. This data is then fed to government agencies, which are now interconnected: the CIA to the FBI, the FBI to local police.

G is for GRENADE LAUNCHERS. The federal government has distributed more than \$18 billion worth of battlefield-appropriate military weapons, vehicles and equipment such as drones, tanks, and grenade launchers to domestic police departments across the country. As a result, most small-town police forces now have enough firepower to render any citizen resistance futile.

H is for HOLLOW-POINT BULLETS. The government's efforts to militarize and weaponize its agencies and employees is reaching epic proportions, with federal agencies as varied as the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration stockpiling millions of lethal hollow-point bullets, which violate international law. Ironically, while the government continues to push for stricter gun laws for the general populace, the U.S. military's arsenal of weapons makes the average American's handgun look like a Tinker Toy.

I is for the INTERNET OF THINGS, in which internet-connected "things" will monitor your home, your health and your habits

in order to keep your pantry stocked, your utilities regulated and your life under control and relatively worry-free. The key word here, however, is control. This "connected" industry propels us closer to a future where police agencies apprehend virtually anyone if the government "thinks" they may commit a crime, driverless cars populate the highways, and a person's biometrics are constantly scanned and used to track their movements, target them for advertising, and keep them under perpetual surveillance.

J is for JAILING FOR PROFIT. Having outsourced their inmate population to private prisons run by private corporations, this profit-driven form of mass punishment has given rise to a \$70 billion private prison industry that relies on the complicity of state governments to keep their privately run prisons full by jailing large numbers of Americans for inane crimes.

K is for KENTUCKY V. KING. In an 8-1 ruling, the Supreme Court ruled that police officers can break into homes, without a warrant, even if it's the wrong home as long as they think they have a reason to do so. Despite the fact that the police in question ended up pursuing the wrong suspect, invaded the wrong apartment and violated just about every tenet that stands between us and a police state, the Court sanctioned the warrantless raid, leaving Americans with little real protection in the face of all manner of abuses by law enforcement officials.

L is for LICENSE PLATE READERS, which enable law enforcement and private agencies to track the whereabouts of vehicles, and their occupants, all across the country. This data collected on tens of thousands of innocent people is also being shared between police agencies, as well as with fusion centers and private companies.

M is for MAIN CORE. Since the 1980s, the U.S. government has acquired and maintained,

The federal government has distributed more than \$18 billion worth of battlefield-appropriate military weapons, vehicles and equipment such as drones, tanks, and grenade launchers to domestic police departments

ALPHABET SOUP

On any given day, the average American going about his daily business will be monitored, surveilled, spied on and tracked in more than 20 different ways, by both government and corporate eyes and ears

without warrant or court order, a database of names and information on Americans considered to be threats to the nation. As Salon reports, this database, reportedly dubbed “Main Core,” is to be used by the Army and FEMA in times of national emergency or under martial law to locate and round up Americans seen as threats to national security. As of 2008, there were some 8 million Americans in the Main Core database.

N is for NO-KNOCK RAIDS. Owing to the militarization of the nation’s police forces, SWAT teams are now increasingly being deployed for routine police matters. In fact, more than 80,000 of these paramilitary raids are carried out every year. That translates to more than 200 SWAT team raids every day in which police crash through doors, damage private property, terrorize adults and children alike, kill family pets, assault or shoot anyone that is perceived as threatening – and all in the pursuit of someone merely suspected of a crime, usually some small amount of drugs.

O is for OVERCRIMINALIZATION. Thanks to an overabundance of 4500-plus federal crimes and 400,000 plus rules and regulations, it’s estimated that the average American actually commits three felonies a day without knowing it. As a result of this overcriminalization, we’re seeing an uptick in Americans being arrested and jailed for such absurd “violations” as letting their kids play at a park unsupervised, collecting rainwater and snow runoff on their own property, growing vegetables in their yard, and holding Bible studies in their living room.

P is for PATHOCRACY. When our own government treats us as things to be manipulated, maneuvered, mined for data, manhandled by police, mistreated, and then jailed in profit-driven private prisons if we dare step out of line, we are no longer operating under a constitutional republic. Instead, what we are experiencing is a pathocracy: tyranny at the hands of a psychopathic govern-

ment, which “operates against the interests of its own people except for favoring certain groups.”

Q is for QUALIFIED IMMUNITY. Qualified immunity allows officers to walk away without paying a dime for their wrongdoing. Conveniently, those deciding whether a police officer should be immune from having to personally pay for misbehavior on the job all belong to the same system, all cronies with a vested interest in protecting the police and their infamous code of silence: city and county attorneys, police commissioners, city councils and judges.

R is for ROADSIDE STRIP SEARCHES and BLOOD DRAWS. The courts have increasingly erred on the side of giving government officials – especially the police – vast discretion in carrying out strip searches, blood draws and even anal probes for a broad range of violations, no matter how minor the offense. In the past, strip searches were resorted to only in exceptional circumstances where police were confident that a serious crime was in progress. In recent years, however, strip searches have become routine operating procedures in which everyone is rendered a suspect and, as such, is subjected to treatment once reserved for only the most serious of criminals.

S is for the SURVEILLANCE STATE. On any given day, the average American going about his daily business will be monitored, surveilled, spied on and tracked in more than 20 different ways, by both government and corporate eyes and ears. A byproduct of this new age in which we live, whether you’re walking through a store, driving your car, checking email, or talking to friends and family on the phone, you can be sure that some government agency, whether the NSA or some other entity, is listening in and tracking your behavior. This doesn’t even begin to touch on the corporate trackers that monitor your purchases, web browsing, Facebook

posts and other activities taking place in the cyber sphere.

T is for TASERS. Nonlethal weapons such as tasers, stun guns, rubber pellets and the like, have resulted in police using them as weapons of compliance more often and with less restraint – even against women and children – and in some instances, even causing death. These “nonlethal” weapons also enable police to aggress with the push of a button, making the potential for overblown confrontations over minor incidents that much more likely. A Taser Shockwave, for instance, can electrocute a crowd of people at the touch of a button.

U is for UNARMED CITIZENS SHOT BY POLICE. No longer is it unusual to hear about incidents in which police shoot unarmed individuals first and ask questions later, often attributed to a fear for their safety. Yet the fatality rate of on-duty patrol officers is reportedly far lower than many other professions, including construction, logging, fishing, truck driving, and even trash collection.

V is for VIPR SQUADS. So-called “soft target” security inspections, carried out by roving VIPR task forces, comprised of federal air marshals, surface transportation security inspectors, transportation security officers, behavior detection officers and explosive detection canine teams, are taking place whenever and wherever the government deems appropriate, at random times and places, and without needing the justification of a particular threat.

W is for WHOLE-BODY SCANNERS. Using either x-ray radiation or radio waves, scanning devices are being used not only to “see” through your clothes but government mobile units can drive by your home and spy on you within the privacy of your home. While these mobile scanners are being sold to the American public as necessary security and safety measures, we can ill afford to forget that such

systems are rife with the potential for abuse, not only by government bureaucrats but by the technicians employed to operate them

X is for X-KEYSCORE. One of the many spying programs carried out by the National Security Agency (NSA) that targets every person in the United States who uses a computer or phone. This top-secret program “allows analysts to search with no prior authorization through vast databases containing emails, online chats and the browsing histories of millions of individuals.”

Y is for YOU-NESS. Using your face, mannerisms, social media and “you-ness” against you, you can now be tracked based on what you buy, where you go, what you do in public, and how you do what you do. Facial recognition software promises to create a society in which every individual who steps out into public is tracked and recorded as they go about their daily business. The goal is for government agents to be able to scan a crowd of people and instantaneously identify all of the individuals present. Facial recognition programs are being rolled out in states all across the country.

Z is for ZERO TOLERANCE. We have moved into a new paradigm in which young people are increasingly viewed as suspects and treated as criminals by school officials and law enforcement alike, often for engaging in little more than childish behavior. In some jurisdictions, students have also been penalized under school zero tolerance policies for such inane “crimes” as carrying cough drops, wearing black lipstick, bringing nail clippers to school, using Listerine or Scope, and carrying fold-out combs that resemble switchblades.

As you can see, the warning signs are all around us. The question is whether you will organize, take a stand and fight for freedom, or will you, like so many clueless Americans, freely walk into the slaughterhouse? **CT**

Young people are increasingly viewed as suspects and treated as criminals by school officials and law enforcement alike, often for engaging in little more than childish behavior

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John W. Whitehead is a constitutional attorney and author. He is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His latest book “Battlefield America: The War on the American People” is available at amazon.com

The name game

David Edwards on Daesh, The Revolutionary Neoliberal Party and the British Falsehood Corporation

“The BBC is full of Conservatives and former New Labour apparatchiks with almost identical views about politics, business and the world. Executives have stuffed their pockets with public money”

Lord Hall, the director general of the BBC, is to be questioned by MPs over his refusal to refer to Islamic State using the term ‘Daesh’ (an Arabic abbreviation that means ‘one who crushes something underfoot’ and ‘one who sows discord’) because it is pejorative and therefore biased. Controversial British prime minister David Cameron had sent a request to the BBC supported in a letter signed by 120 MPs from across the spectrum – Labour, Tory and SNP.

Independent journalist Jonathan Cook comments: “So let us agree that Cameron can insist on the BBC calling Islamic State ‘Daesh’ when he also insists on the broadcaster referring to the Conservatives as the ‘Revolutionary Neoliberal Party’ [RNP].”

Julian Lewis, RNP chairman of the defence select committee, said he would also be writing to the BBC: “The BBC ought to hang its head in shame – they would never dream of taking this attitude if we were talking about the fascists or the Nazis... We are engaged in a counter propaganda war of ideas – and the British used to be rather good at this during the Cold War.”

Chris Grayling, a member of the RNP British Cabinet and leader of the Commons, apparently detected no self-contradiction when he said the BBC should openly take the side of the UK in international conflicts: “During the Second World War, the BBC was a beacon

of fact, it was not expected to be impartial between Britain and Germany.”

Of course, the idea that political parties should pressure media to produce biased information was one of the horrors Britain was said to be fighting from 1939-1945. Also, the notion that the BBC should be guided by emergency measures adopted in a time of total war against a Nazi state genuinely threatening conquest indicates the curious mindset of some on the right.

In reality, as Seumas Milne noted in the *Guardian*: “The BBC is full of Conservatives and former New Labour apparatchiks with almost identical views about politics, business and the world. Executives have stuffed their pockets with public money.”

Milne added: “There is no point in romanticising a BBC golden age. The corporation was always an establishment institution, deeply embedded in the security state and subject to direct government control in an emergency.”

Indeed, the BBC was founded in 1922 and immediately used as a propaganda weapon for the Baldwin government during the General Strike, when it became known by workers as the ‘British Falsehood Corporation’ (BFC).

Perhaps the BBC should rebrand itself. Actor Ken Stott commented in the *Radio Times*: “The establishment is a dirty, dangerous beast and the BBC is a mouthpiece for

that.” (*Radio Times*, December 3, 2014)

This helps explain a tweet sent recently by the BBC’s high-profile diplomatic editor, Mark Urban: “Anti-Americanism alive & well as shown by ‘who is biggest threat to world peace?’ Survey via @INTLSpectator”

For the embedded BBC, viewing America, very reasonably, as a lethal threat is to be guilty of something called “Anti-Americanism.”

But for some, too much is not enough. In the *Telegraph*, Stephen Pollard, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, commented on the BBC chief’s limp resistance to imposed thought control:

“He appears to believe that impartial reporting means equidistance between a terror group which butchers its victims and the rest of humanity.

“But equidistance is not the same as impartiality.”

Run that past us again:

“Impartiality means accuracy and reliability in news gathering – which ought indeed to be the BBC’s governing ethos. It does not mean refusing ever to make any judgments between two sides in a conflict.”

How so?

“Because in the real, impartial world, there is no equidistance between Daesh and its victims.”

Whatever “equidistance is not the same as impartiality” means – arguably, it means nothing – presumably the “logic” can be applied elsewhere. After all, in “the real, impartial world,” there is also no “equidistance” between Nato and its victims. So perhaps we should demand that the BBC describe Nato as “The Western Corporate Mercenary Army,” or “The Western State-Corporate Militant Mob,” because impartiality is one thing and equidistance quite another. As everyone knows.

Inevitably, the response of David Jordan, the BBC’s director of editorial policy and standards, to these state-corporate attacks was less than heroic: “Suggesting that the BBC wants to be fair to the so called ‘Islamic

State’ distorts the truth...”

It was “a distortion,” then, to suggest that the BBC aims to be “fair,” Jordan continued: “Our aim, as always, is to report accurately and report the facts – nothing else.”

Facts are sacred; it’s not the BBC’s job to make judgements. Except: “The BBC has at its cornerstone a commitment to democracy and its pillars. The BBC is no friend of authoritarian repression anywhere in the world and our history shows it.”

The ‘democracy and its pillars’ being, of course, “us.” As for “authoritarian repression” – well, that’s “them.” as labelled by the government for a BBC intent on reporting “the facts – nothing else.”

Appropriately enough, Sir Christopher Bland, who chaired the BBC between 1996 and 2001, argued this week that the BBC “is worryingly close to becoming an arm of the Government,”

Bland said of Cameron’s government: “Rather subtly and unattractively it draws the BBC closer to becoming [sic] an arm of government which is always something that the BBC and government have resisted.”

This recalls former director general Greg Dyke’s quickly-buried assertion that BBC bosses and political journalists are determined to protect Britain’s elite-favouring status quo because they “are part of one Westminster conspiracy. They don’t want anything to change. It’s not in their interests.”

‘Those to whom evil is done, do evil in return’

An interesting example of how the BBC is “no friend of authoritarian repression” was provided in the summer of 2013, when a spanner clattered into the works of the West’s Perpetual War machine.

Since 2011, it had been clear that the US-UK allies were intent on making Syria the next target for overt “humanitarian intervention,” in addition to its behind-the-scenes support. The endless stream of atrocity claims – civilian massacres, gas and napalm attacks – sourced from US-UK “intelligence” and

BBC bosses and political journalists “are part of one Westminster conspiracy. They don’t want anything to change. It’s not in their interests”

WRONG LABEL?

Abu Sakkar was given high-profile space, not just to give his version of events, but to supply mitigating background detail and unchallenged propaganda

pro-”rebel” Syrian “activists,” was a brazen replay of the 2002-2003 Iraq war media campaign. The effort was again to persuade the public to support a black and white struggle between ‘good’ - the “rebels” - and “evil,” the Syrian government.

Alas, then, Syrian “rebel” commander, Abu Sakkar, was filmed cutting the heart out of a dead Syrian soldier and eating it before a cheering crowd. Sakkar declared to the camera: “We will eat your hearts and your livers you soldiers of [Syrian leader] Bashar the dog.”

This was decidedly off-message. Russian leader Vladimir Putin told a G8 summit news conference: “These are people who don’t just kill their enemies, they open up their bodies, and eat their intestines in front of the public and the cameras. Are these the people you want to... supply with weapons?”

Trusty BBC propagandist Paul Wood came to the rescue, commenting of Abu Sakkar that “meeting him face-to-face, he seems a bit more circumspect: ‘I didn’t want to do this. I had to,’ he tells me.”

Abu Sakkar was given high-profile space, not just to give his version of events, but to supply mitigating background detail and unchallenged propaganda.

Wood wrote: “He joined the demonstrations when they started in the spring of 2011. Then, he says, a woman and child were shot dead at a protest. His brother went to help. He, too, was shot and killed...”

“Along the way, he lost another brother, many relatives, and countless of his men. His parents were arrested and he says the police rang him so he could hear them being beaten...”

“ ‘Put yourself in my shoes,’ he says.”

Imagine the BBC inviting readers to place themselves in the shoes of an Islamic State cannibal. The simple act of interviewing Abu Sakkar humanised him in a way that is unthinkable for Islamic State fighters, or any other official enemy perpetrating a comparable act.

The BBC reinforced Abu Sakkar’s efforts

to blame his actions on the Syrian government, a constant theme in the BBC piece and other media reports. In stark contrast, when MPs Alex Salmond and George Galloway attempted to argue that UK foreign policy was a major factor behind the ‘7/7’ bombings in London, their comments were dismissed as “crass” and “in poor taste” by the BBC journalists interviewing them.

The BBC allowed Abu Sakkar to call for a “no-fly zone,” a key goal of Western warmongers who had used the same strategy in 2011 when Nato terrorist bombers had overthrown Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi:

“If we don’t get help, a no-fly zone, heavy weapons, we will do worse [than I did]. You’ve seen nothing yet.”

The BBC also gave Abu Sakkar scope to downplay his actions: “I didn’t bite into [the heart],” Abu Sakkar says, “I just held it for show.”

Wood even quoted the poet W H Auden: “Those to whom evil is done, do evil in return.”

A wonderfully compassionate response, then, to Abu Sakkar’s obscene act. Can we imagine any BBC journalist quoting Auden in response to the recent horrific massacre of 38 British and other tourists on a Tunisian beach in Sousse by Seifeddine Rezgui Yacoubi? We can only guess at the level of outrage that would generate.

But, as we saw above, even this level of breath-taking, in fact grotesque, subservience to the needs of government propaganda is insufficient for those on the hard right.

The *Telegraph* published a piece under the remarkable title: “Syrian ‘cannibal’ rebel explains his actions.”

In the *Independent*, propagandist Ken Sengupta was also willing to empathise:

“Khalid al-Hamad (Abu Sakkar is his nom de guerre) was not always a bloodthirsty man of violence...”

“The question remains what turned al-Hamad into Abu Sakkar, the man who proudly appears in a video mutilating a corpse... What made someone who had once

cautioned against blaming the Alawites - the minority community from which the ruling elite are drawn - for the regime's actions into their virulent hater?"

Understanding was sought, in other words - again, unthinkable for the official enemy. Like Wood, Sengupta referenced a source 'correcting early reports that he ate a piece of heart, pointing out it was lungs'. It wasn't a heart at all and he hadn't eaten it; he had just cut out a bit of lung from a corpse and held it to his mouth.

So who was responsible for the atrocity? Sengupta referenced the view of Haitham Mohammed Nassr, a former "rebel" fighter, who said the atrocity "should be put in the context of the crimes being committed by the Shabiha, the Alawite pro-regime militia."

Sengupta concluded: "There is little doubt that brutality with which the regime responded to peaceful protests in Baba Amr and elsewhere in Syria was the catalyst for the armed uprising which followed."

The "rebel" view was even allowed to conclude this piece ostensibly focused on "rebel" crimes: "We all want Bashar to go, the

longer this goes on the more violent people become."

Key propaganda messages clearly attempting to transform a PR disaster for Western warmongers into ammunition justifying an imminent attack on the Syrian government.

This was a powerful example of the true flexibility of corporate media ethics. Such astonishing apologetics are permissible for an act which, if committed by an official enemy, would be instantly and relentlessly condemned, with any attempt to explore the perpetrator's motives dismissed as outrageous. Thus the verdict of the *Daily Mirror* on the Tunisian beach atrocity in Sousse: "The Islamist terrorists are evil and must be defeated." (Leading article, "Don't give in to terror," *Daily Mirror*, June 30, 2015)

Simple. There is nothing to discuss, nothing to understand, no context, certainly no sense that the West's Perpetual War machine might share some blame. **CT**

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David Edwards is co-editor of Medialens
- <http://medialens.org> - the British media watchdog

There is nothing to discuss, nothing to understand, no context, certainly no sense that the West's Perpetual War machine might share some blame

Life and Death on the Mavi Marmara

A photo essay by Kevin Neish



Download pdf at <http://coldtype.net/Assets.11/pdfs/0311.Mavi.hr.pdf>

Out and about with the suburban soul seekers

Dell Franklin may not know about soul coaching, energy healing or soul retrieving, but he knows a thing or two about emotional clarity . . .

She showed me her winning ex-homecoming queen smile when spotting my eyes scoping her through the rearview mirror and informed me she was going to the Apple Farm Motel

I liked the way this lady signaled me as I stood by my cab across the street from the Amtrak station where departing passengers filed out. Her signal was assertive without being demanding or aggressive. One glance at her and I recognized affluence and sophistication fueled by the intelligence and ambition that leads to it. She was around forty, with those pricy trendy boots and scarf, all bundled up, carrying but one Louis Vuitton bag which I snatched and placed in the trunk and then opened her rear door.

She showed me her winning ex-homecoming queen smile when spotting my eyes scoping her through the rearview mirror and informed me she was going to the Apple Farm Motel and asked was it far?

“No. It’s at the end of motel row in town.”

“I hear it’s very nice.”

“It’s nice. It’s plush. It’s kind of corny, but not as corny as the famous Madonna Inn.”

“What do you mean by corny?”

“Pleasantville is probably better, with a dash of Disneyland. I would call it modern quaint. Know what I mean?”

“Getting the picture.” Again the smile.

Her perfume was just subtle enough not to overpower the interior of the cab. “Here for business?” I asked. “Lots of business

people stay at the Apple Farm. Lots of people who do business with Cal Poly.”

“No. I’m only staying one night. It’s part of a package for a retreat I’m going to about thirty miles from here out in the country.”

“I see. You came north. LA?”

“Orange County. Mission Viejo.”

“May I ask what kind of retreat?”

“Certainly. It’s called soul coaching.”

Very politely, I asked. “What exactly is soul coaching?”

“It’s difficult to explain unless you have time.” I noticed she wore no wedding ring. “This is my first retreat with soul coaching. I’ve been to Esalen, too. Not quite what the doctor ordered.”

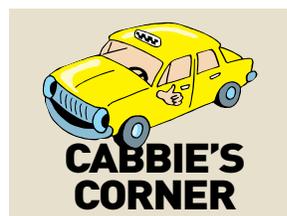
I decided not to ask why her soul needed coaching. Instead, I said, “You ever hear of Emotional Clarity?”

“Yes, I have!” she was a little more up in her seat.

“My best friend’s wife is big on Emotional Clarity. She tried Dr. Wayne Dyer and Deepak Chopra, and those guys didn’t help her, though she loves them, so now she’s deep into Emotional Clarity.”

“Has it made a difference in the quality of her life?”

“To be completely honest, she seems more confused and discontented than ever. She’s got a prince of a husband, a well pay-



ing, fulfilling job as a middle school English teacher, but she gets up at five in the morning to ride a stationary bike for an hour and a half in a dark room and then eats birdseed, and most of her girl friends are in the same boat.”

“Well, maybe she’s happy doing those things.”

“Her husband and me, we lack emotional clarity, too, according to these women, so our cure from time to time is to go to San Francisco and play basketball against a bunch of black dudes and talk trash with them and afterwards go on a monumental drinking binge in as many Frisco bars as possible before they close.”

She issued a full-throated, good-natured laugh, hearty and appreciative of my spiel. “If it works, more power to you. Sounds like fun to me.”

When we pulled up at the Apple Farm she was impressed with its storybook cottages. I took her bag to the front desk and for a five dollar ride she gave me a twenty and told me to keep the change and claimed she had a wonderful time talking to me. She made my shift.

A few months later I picked up another woman at the airport and drove her to the same motel. Unlike the lady from Mission Viejo, she had short hair shaped like a helmet and a tense look, and it was obvious she was driven and intelligent by the keen focus in her eyes. I knew she was coming from the San Diego area due to viewing the flight board inside the airport. She wore designer jeans and a mannish shirt that smacked of high-end hemp.

“The Apple Farm’s pretty nice,” I told her. Her lone bag was in the trunk. “Got a decent restaurant with great deserts.”

“I’m only staying one night.”

“The last lady I picked up for one night at the Apple Farm was going to a retreat.”

A flicker of interest interrupted her dismissing of me as she opened her computer. “What kind of retreat?”

“Soul coaching.”

She closed her computer. “Well, that’s interesting. I’m going to a retreat for soul retrieval.”

“I see. How does one go about retrieving their soul?”

“It’s impossible to explain in a limited time frame in simple layman’s terminology. In short, it deals with rediscovering your soul and becoming more intimate with those feelings connected to your soul without intellectualizing the process.”

Realizing she was smarter than me, I said, “Is it, like, you lose your soulfulness because of self-inflicted stress, or outside-induced stress, or the emptiness of overachieving leading to an abundance of materialism? Or does it have to do with taking up with men who are heels and jerks?”

She almost smiled. “Mainly, it’s recapturing the soul you were born with and formed in childhood but lose part of along the way by doing the things that allow you to lose your way.”

“You ever hear of Emotional Clarity?”

“Yes I have,” she said, perked up.

“My best friend’s wife has become an Emotional Clarity mentor. She and her friends, mostly school teachers, go to Emotional Clarity retreats and run seminars. They eat cheese and salt-less nuts and sip wine from Trader Joe’s and work out a lot. I’m talking two, three hours a day. Some of these gals were married to cultists and bikers, and they’re all educated, sophisticated women. None of them can cook and they’re always reading the latest self-help books.”

“No wonder they need emotional clarity,” she quipped tightly.

“My best friend, the husband of the Emotional Clarity mentor, is a coach and history teacher at the same middle school. We achieve emotional clarity by going to San Francisco every few months to play basketball with inner city blacks and talk trash with them and then get monstrously drunk in lowlife bars throughout the city. When we get home we feel thoroughly purged of

“We achieve emotional clarity by going to San Francisco every few months to play basketball with inner city blacks and talk trash with them and then get monstrously drunk in lowlife bars throughout the city. When we get home we feel thoroughly purged of any emotional congestion”

ON THE ROAD

The very same wife wore designer attire and had short blond-tinted hair and sported a tennis tan and slender muscular arms

any emotional congestion.”

This lady, unlike the soul coached lady, pruned up upon hearing my spiel and never said another word to me, not even a thank you when I carried her bag to the desk, and left me a puny tip. Icy cold.

A couple of months later I picked up a woman at the airport who was going to the gated community surrounding the country club and golf course, THE exclusive enclave in San Luis Obispo. The CC is off the same artery as the airport and, depending on where beyond the front gate, the fare is anywhere between \$8 and \$10. I could not remember the last time I'd gotten a tip of over a dollar and change at the CC and even Latino nannies I'd driven there tipped better and at least talked to me.

I recalled driving this very same woman and her older, paunchy husband from the airport to their palatial digs just off the golf course a year or so ago when their Lexus would not start. Both became busy with their computers and said nary a word to me until we passed through the gate manned by a security guard in uniform, and this was to issue directions in a manner indicating I was only bright enough to remember one street at a time.

When we arrived and I carried their bags to the front door, the husband, after leafing through several singles I'd given him in change, made sure to deliver me a long look to make sure I thanked him for the dollar tip he held before me, while the wife, who seemed agitated, scurried inside.

This time the very same wife wore designer attire and had short blond-tinted hair and sported a tennis tan and slender muscular arms. Before she could pull out her computer in the back seat, I startled her with a question.

“Are you returning from some sort of retreat, ma'am?”

She perked up. “How would you know that?”

“Well, lots of ladies I pick up these days

go to retreats – like soul coaxing, soul retrieval, emotional clarity...”

She appeared severe at my meddling. “Have you heard of energy healing?”

“No. But it sounds kind of interesting. What exactly does it involve, if you don't mind my asking?” I said with emphasized politeness.

“Energy healing alleviates emotional damage and mental pain, even physical pain,” she said in a kind of rehearsed, robotic monotone as she gazed out the window. “The healing of these ailments is through music and certain musical chords from a variety of instruments. If one relaxes, and really concentrates and listens, almost in a transcendental state, as in meditation, and allows the sounds to wash over you, like, for instance, a harp, a violin, a flute, one feels their inner turmoil, their stress, and the pain that produces it, gradually dissolve, and hopefully disappear.”

Gazing in my rearview, I wondered when was the last time this perfectly conditioned physical specimen with the haggard, distracted face had been properly touched by her fat, smug sluggard of a husband in their mini mansion with too many rooms and a swimming pool.

“How long does it take for the pain to return after you come back to the stress chamber,” I ventured with the humility of a lowly, curious cab driver.

“I have a range of sounds to use as therapy on my own.”

“The concept sounds fascinating. You take my best friend's wife. She's tried a bunch of these retreats and settled on Emotional Clarity therapy. She's embraced it in a profound and passionate way.”

“I've heard of Emotional Clarity. I've done no research on it.”

“She's a school teacher and she got all her friends to go to emotional clarity retreats and seminars and now they're conducting their own seminars and they're in the process of writing a book on it. These gals were all married to cultists and moldy bikers who

put them through sexual torture and none of them can cook and they eat stuff like rice cakes with no butter, only low-cal margarine!”

“Do they have a publisher for their book?” she was all business now.

“I’m thinking they’ll self-publish. Seventy five per cent of books published these days are self-help. They think they’re gonna cash in big time and won’t have to teach anymore and can devote all their time to emotional clarity seminars and eventually go on speaking tours and maybe end up on the Oprah Winfrey Show. My best friend’s wife teaches junior high English. Those kids drive her crazy. Her husband, the coach, he’s my best friend and teaches history, and his kids, when those monsters try and drive him crazy he throws toilet plungers at ‘em and threatens to beat them up!”

“He throws toilet plungers at children?”

“Yeh, Rocco’s from New Jersey. His kids are terrified of him, but they love him. When Rocco and I need a little emotional clarity and soul work we go on a basketball

and boozing pilgrimage to San Francisco and confer with street loonies in dives. We get so drunk we purge everything, and surviving a crushing hangover and feeling totally refreshed is part of the process. Me and coach could probably write our own book and start our own seminars.”

The lady was speechless as I drove through the security gate. When she started to give me directions, I told her I already knew where she lived, and she appeared more severe than ever when I pulled up to her circular driveway. I carried her luggage to the front door, and when she told me to keep the change from a ten dollar bill on a \$9.00 fare, and quickly disappeared into the big, dark house, I made sure to thank her with the graciousness and humility of a dedicated bottom-feeder. **CT**

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Dell Franklin is a long-time journalist and former publisher of the Rogue Voice newspaper in California. He writes a weekly baseball blog, The Ball Player’s Son, at <http://kelsoswing.blogspot.com>

“Her husband, the coach, he’s my best friend and teaches history, and his kids, when those monsters try and drive him crazy he throws toilet plungers at ‘em and threatens to beat them up!”



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On board the Gaza boat

Kevin Neish brings a tale of piracy and violence in the latest – but not the last – attempt to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza

They initially approached us in white Coast Guard zodiac boats, just for media spin purposes, and then attacked with military zodiacs full of heavily armed soldiers

I'm happy that I am back home safe and sound after a few days in Israeli prisons, but I would much rather be in Gaza right now, handing the Marianne av Goteborg to the Palestinian fishers.

On the 29th at 2 am, the Israelis attacked us, when we were more than 100 nautical miles (185 km) from Israel, while we were still off Egypt, near the entrance to the Suez Canal. They used four warships full of hundreds of IOF (Israeli Occupation Forces) soldiers and sailors. They initially approached us in white Coast Guard zodiac boats, just for media spin purposes, and then attacked with military zodiacs full of heavily armed soldiers. We saw the Coast Guard zodiacs being lifted onto a warship after the attack, like movie props being stored away.

Three activists, including Canadian professor Bob Lovelace, were sitting or standing in front of the bridge door, and were all immediately and repeatedly tasered. Bob lost count after six taser hits. I was inside the bridge during the attack, assisting the captain and dealing with the engines. I believe it took the Israelis about 45 minutes to finally break through the locked and barred doors and hatches and into the bridge. While I was being marched out on to the deck I believe a soldier poked me in the ribs with a stun wand (cattle prod) just for fun, but it was nothing compared to the taser hits Bob got. The Norwegian third mate was

also tasered and beaten because he refused to remove his Palestinian scarf.

Just before the Israelis took over the bridge, on the captain's order, I had disabled the engine, but only in a very simple manner. For the safety of the ship, he required that the engine could be restarted within a minute, in case it was in any danger. The Israelis spent three hours trying in vain to restart the engine and then tried to order me to assist them, which I refused to do. We told them that as they had illegally hijacked the ship, it was their problem, not ours. So then they beat the captain and threatened to do the same to me unless we restarted the engine for them.

At this point, the captain wisely decided that it was not worth everyone being beaten, as the Israelis were getting very aggressive, and so he asked me to restart the engine. I went to the engine room, and simply reached down and turned on the battery master switch. As my Mom would say – these guys were not the sharpest tacks in the drawer, but they made up for that in brutality.

From this point on, it was just a series of luggage and strip searches, interrogations and continuous attempts to humiliate us. It was obvious they were all very angry, which is a good sign. At the Ashdod port they took many things from me, and kindly gave me a receipt. And then at the prison they took



“Please stop the boat now. Otherwise you will be hurting people,” says an amplified voice from the Israeli zodiac. “No, YOU will be hurting people by illegally trying to board our boat. Go away,” replies a crew member aboard the Marianne av Goteborg.

more things away, including my earlier receipt, and gave me no receipt. In particular the Israelis wanted all the cameras, cell phones and computers, to prevent anyone from having video evidence of their brutal assault. But some camera chips, including mine, were smuggled out and will be used in an upcoming Swedish trial.

After two days in a filthy prison cell, with just a hole in the floor for a toilet and a pipe coming out of the wall for a shower, we were sent to the airport detention prison, which had a proper bathroom and shower. But as I finished my shower, I reached for one of the “clean” towels, only to find that an Israeli guard had soiled it with his excrement and then carefully refolded it. All I could think about at that moment was that I had only gone through four days of abuse, whereas Palestinians have had over 68 years of con-

tinuous abuse. The Palestinians’ strength and “sumud” or steadfastness in the face of such brutality, is amazing and inspiring.

I’m sorry we were not able to get the Marianne to Gaza. But the seven-week, 5,000 mile voyage, was a great success from the moment we sailed into our first port, with huge support everywhere we went. Others in the future will build on our effort, and will end the siege and tear down the wall.

Venceremos, we will win. **CT**

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Kevin Neish is a Canadian human rights activist, who worked as an ISM human shield in Bethlehem in 2002, and Gaza in 2013. He was also on board the Mavi Marmara in the first Freedom Flotilla to Gaza in 2010, when Israeli commandos murdered 10 aid workers.

See www.shiptogaza.se for more info

As I finished my shower, I reached for one of the “clean” towels, only to find that an Israeli guard had soiled it with his excrement and then carefully refolded it

See Kevin Neish’s photo essay from the Mavi Marmara attack at <http://coldtype.net/Assets.11/pdfs/0311.Mavi.hr.pdf>

Telling lies for Israel

Jonathan Cook tells why the nation's army of civilian spin-doctors is doomed to defeat

The education ministry has launched a compulsory hasbara course for Israeli students travelling abroad. All youth delegations are now required to learn how to justify to outsiders Israel's policies in the occupied territories

The Israeli government believes it is locked in an epic struggle to save Israel from the growing movement calling for an international boycott. Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu warns that Israel must quickly “rebrand” itself to avoid pariah status.

Ordinary Israelis are therefore being conscripted into an army of spin-doctors in a campaign termed “hasbara” – Hebrew for “public diplomacy”, or more literally “propaganda”.

In the latest offensive, the education ministry has launched a compulsory hasbara course for Israeli students travelling abroad. All youth delegations are now required to learn how to justify to outsiders Israel's policies in the occupied territories. According to officials, the students must challenge those who “seek to delegitimize Israel”.

It is yet more evidence that hasbara has become a national obsession in Israel – and that the line between support for one's country and support for the subjugation of another people has been erased. Some 85 per cent of Israelis tell pollsters they are keen to become hasbara ambassadors for the Netanyahu government.

A hasbara ministry already targets the international media with good news, while cultural events from food fairs to Israeli entries at film festivals are designed to prove

that Israel has another, hidden side.

For years the Israeli government has relied on paid workers – and thousands of volunteers in Israel and abroad – to surf the net posting pro-Israel comments.

At Israel's international airport, Israeli holidaymakers are offered brochures explaining the importance of persuading those they meet that Israel is misunderstood. Advice suggests emphasising successes such as Israel's invention of drip irrigation and popular varieties of the cherry tomato.

And yet the latest hasbara drive is as unlikely to reverse Israel's slow slide into ignominy as its predecessors.

The hasbara industry's chief flaw, as Israeli political scientist Neve Gordon observes, is its assumption that “the merchandise is fine, and only the packaging needs to be replaced”.

Losing control

But rapid developments in information technology mean Israel has less control over its image than ever before.

First it was 24-hour rolling news, then the internet. Now cheap smartphones make every Palestinian a potential documentary-maker, ensuring that moments of cruelty and oppression are captured and available for anyone who cares to look.

Palestinians post online videos of their everyday abuse: from demolition of homes

to stone-throwers being shot with live ammunition; from settlers burning crops to children being dragged by soldiers from their beds in the middle of the night.

Recently, 56-year-old Zaki Sabah, a familiar cake vendor in Jerusalem's Old City, starred in one such video. Bystanders filmed him being savagely beaten by Israeli police on a busy road. Denied a permit for many years by the occupation authorities, Sabah has been repeatedly fined and jailed.

Meanwhile, another video exposed Israel's deceitful account of its supposedly peaceful interception of a boat trying to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza. As more than a dozen passengers were held captive, footage was smuggled out showing that Israeli commandos had electrocuted some of them with tasers during the takeover. (*See pages 30 and 31 of this issue*)

Charred church

Troubling imagery is not restricted to the occupied territories. Film of the charred interior of a historic church next to the Sea of Galilee highlighted last month the latest hate crime by Jewish extremists against Israel's large Palestinian minority.

The futility of trying to staunch the tide of evidence damning Israel on media old and new was exemplified by Moshe Yaalon, the defence minister.

"There is no humanitarian distress in Gaza," he averred, while the media illustrated reports of his speech with pictures of mountains of rubble and children still homeless a year after Israel's massive assault on the besieged enclave.

Yaalon's sophistry may placate Israel's diehard supporters but the rest of us are more often incensed by such insults to our intelligence.

The hasbara offensive is doomed for another reason.

With the Palestinians' case substantiated by evidence, rather than Israel's, the evangelists of hasbara have only one recourse: to blame the messenger.

Critics of Israel, it is implied, are either inveterate dupes or unabashed anti-semites. Either they have been deceived by the Israel-haters, or they are haters themselves.

As the hasbara industry moves into overdrive, such slurs are becoming all too common – including against those Israel most urgently needs to cultivate as allies.

Judith Nir Mozes, the wife of interior minister Silvan Shalom, a Netanyahu confidant, possibly reflected high-level thinking in Israel when she tweeted last month a racist "joke" about President Barack Obama. "Do u know what Obama Coffee is? Black and weak," she wrote, ridiculing the leader of Israel's most important ally.

Similarly, the Israeli foreign ministry hurried to mock foreign journalists, even though they are hasbara's target audience.

In a short animated video, a naïve reporter is shown claiming that the people of Gaza simply want peace as militants fire rockets just behind him. Next the reporter misidentifies Hamas' tunnelling as the "first Palestinian subway system". The video ends with a warning: "Open your eyes, terror rules Gaza."

Michael Oren, Israel's recently departed ambassador to the US, has joined the fray too, castigating American Jewish journalists as "self-haters" for their critical coverage of the Israeli prime minister.

Hasbara's cartoon version of reality is not only unconvincing but, in alienating friends as much as foes, self-defeating. Netanyahu may hope to repackage Israel, but his product – ongoing oppression of Palestinians – is one few can be persuaded to buy. **CT**

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

In a short animated video, a naïve reporter is shown claiming that the people of Gaza simply want peace as militants fire rockets just behind him

London Falling

Out on the town with
paparazzo **Alan Chapman**



Laugh. But don't judge. It could have been you (perhaps). Or me (definitely). A few drinks with pals in a throbbing nightclub. Effusive farewells. Step outside into the cool air. Wham. Face down in gutter. Aroused by rough licks from a stray dog. Get up. Shake head. Clutch lamppost for support. Stagger home. Collapse into bed. Merciful oblivion . . .

Next morning. Wake up. Aching head. Dry mouth. Brain fog slowly clears. Did I really pass out in the middle of the West End? Surely I didn't take off *all* my clothes and climb onto a taxi. Nooooo! Just a bad dream. A nightmare. Right? Wrong! Well, thankfully, there were no photographers about.

Oh, shiiiiittttt . . .

Tony Sutton





Alan Chapman's latest book is 'Frame', a collection of celebrity photographs

'We aint found shit!'

Scott Ritter explains why 'no notice' inspection of Iran's nuclear sites by the West are not in the best interests of peace

No notice inspections to investigate 'possible military dimensions', however, go far beyond anything required by the NPT

Nuclear negotiations between Iran and what's known as the P-5 + 1 group of nations (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China and Germany) are scheduled to conclude at the end of last month. A 'framework agreement' was set out in April, but still at issue was what kind of access inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency will have. Iran has agreed to inspections of all the sites it has declared are being used to develop its nuclear power programme. The US insists that any agreement must also address what it calls 'possible military dimensions' – that is, allegations that Iran has pursued an undeclared nuclear weapons capability – and is demanding the right to conduct 'no notice' inspections of nuclear sites, and to interview Iranian nuclear scientists. 'It's critical for us to know going forward,' the US secretary of state, John Kerry, said in June, that 'those activities have been stopped, and that we can account for that in a legitimate way.' France has said that any agreement that doesn't include inspections of military sites would be 'useless'. Iran has been adamant that it won't allow them and that its nuclear scientists are off-limits. These positions seem irreconcilable and unless something changes a nuclear accord is unlikely.

My first experience as a weapons inspector was in implementing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the

US and the former Soviet Union, and I'm a firm believer that on-site inspections should be part of any arms control agreement. As a United Nations weapons inspector in Iraq, I worked closely with the IAEA to investigate Iraq's past nuclear weapons programme, and I have confidence in the IAEA's ability to implement the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The provisions of the NPT are at the heart of the framework agreement with Iran, and the measures contained in it – which include sophisticated remote monitoring, and environmental sampling at undeclared facilities – should be more than adequate to establish whether or not it has diverted any nuclear material to a weapons programme. The framework agreement also calls for a range of verification measures beyond those required by the NPT. These cover centrifuge production and aspects of the uranium fuel cycle such as mining and processing, and are needed to verify that Iran isn't engaged in covert uranium enrichment using a secret cache of centrifuges and unaccounted-for stocks of uranium ore. No notice inspections to investigate 'possible military dimensions', however, go far beyond anything required by the NPT. The question is whether such an intrusive measure is warranted or whether, as Iran argues, the inspections would infringe its legitimate security interests.

The facts appear to support Iran's position. Countries subjected to intrusive no

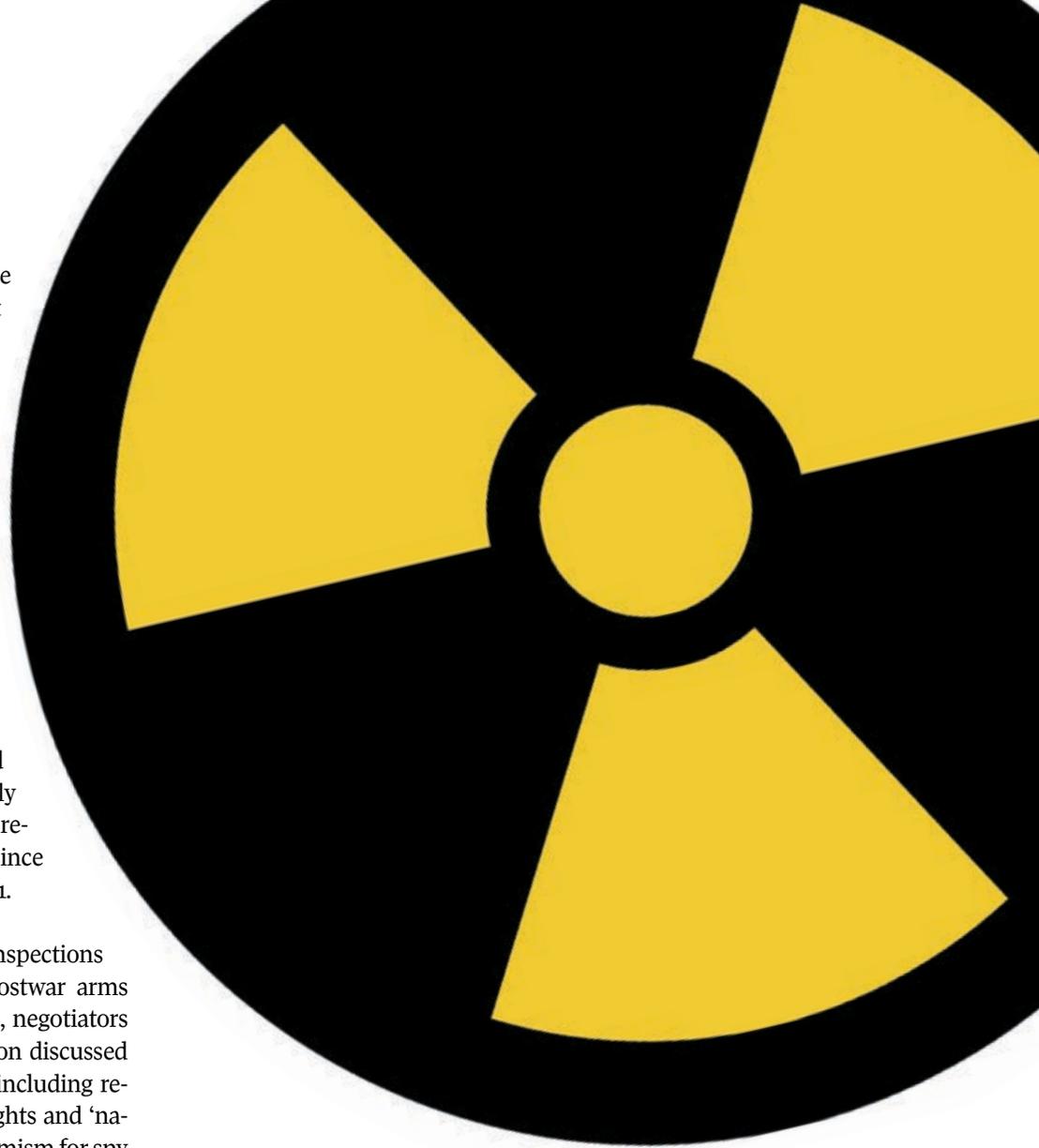
notice inspections have to be confident that the process isn't actually an intelligence-led operation aimed at undermining their legitimate interests. The nuclear framework agreement with Iran doesn't require the IAEA to accept anything Iran declares at face value, but none of its protocols justifies no notice inspections of military sites. Iran signed the Joint Plan of Action in 2013, and has abided by the verification conditions it required without incident. This track record should count in its favour, especially when you consider the dubious results of no notice inspections since they were first carried out in 1991.

Until the late 1980s, on-site inspections hadn't been included in any postwar arms control agreements. For decades, negotiators from the US and the Soviet Union discussed different verification measures, including remote sensor monitoring, overflights and 'national technical means' (a euphemism for spy satellites). But whenever the US raised the possibility of on-site inspections, the Soviet Union would protest, believing that teams of inspectors visiting sensitive sites would be used as a cover for intelligence-gathering. For the Americans, on-site inspections became a litmus test for judging how serious the USSR was about a particular arms control issue. In July 1987, when the Soviet Union accepted a US plan for verification of disarmament that included an intensive programme of on-site inspections, many American negotiators were taken by surprise. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) was signed that December, and on-site inspections became an essential part of disarmament agreements.

By ratifying the INF treaty, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed that teams of inspectors would supervise the destruction of missiles, conduct 'baseline' inspections of

all declared facilities and regular monitoring inspections at each country's largest missile production facility: the Hercules Plant in Utah, and the Votkinsk Machine Building Plant in the foothills of the Urals. Provisions for short-notice 'challenge' inspections – which could be at any declared site and could not be refused – were agreed on and implemented without any serious disputes. Mutual fears over the 'inspector-spy' gaining access to sensitive military installations soon gave way to mutual respect for the professionalism of the inspectors and the inspected.

During the 13 years that on-site inspections were in force, both parties were serious about keeping to the provisions of the INF treaty. Proposals – I know of two – to expand intelligence collection by US inspectors beyond what could be observed through



These 'special' team members, trained in 'close target reconnaissance' and 'surreptitious entry', worked for the Combat Applications Group and the Special Activities Division, better known as Delta Force and the CIA

serendipity were immediately rejected by the CIA. This didn't mean there wasn't any controversy: there was a crisis, for example, over the US installation of an X-ray imaging system known as CargoScan at Votkinsk in the spring of 1990: the Soviet Union was concerned that it might damage the propellant in its non-treaty-limited missiles. But rather than allow their differences to undermine the treaty, both parties continued to refer back to its terms when seeking a solution for any problems. The INF treaty became the template for subsequent arms control and disarmament agreements, whether bilateral (such as the US-Soviet Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START) or multilateral, such as the Security Council resolutions calling for the disarmament of Iraq in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. With START, the INF model worked. In Iraq it didn't.

In the INF model, all inspection procedures were spelled out in the treaty, and what was inspected was determined by data provided by the inspected party. Intelligence played a minor role: the CIA operated two 'gateway' facilities – one in Frankfurt and the other at Yokota Air Base in Japan – which provided support for INF inspections. This support was logistical – equipping and arranging transport for the inspection teams – and it was never the intention that CIA intelligence should alter the course of the inspections themselves.

Inspections in Iraq were initially supposed to operate in the same way, with Security Council resolutions and Iraqi declarations setting the parameters for on-site inspections. But incomplete data submissions and active concealment by Iraq made the INF model hard to follow. For Unscm, the UN programme to inspect Iraqi weapons, on which I served between 1991 and 1998, the CIA set up a 'gateway' operation in Bahrain, with the assistance of the British, Canadian and Australian intelligence services. Intelligence support was available only to those four countries. This led to friction within the inspection teams, and concerns about American influence over what was supposed to be

a UN operation.

Two senior Americans at Unscm with considerable experience in INF inspections, the director of operations and a ballistic missile chief inspector, did their best to strike a balance between the UN's need to maintain its independence and the CIA's sensitivities over information security. But Iraqi obstruction made it possible for the CIA to criticise both men for being too soft on the Iraqis and having an anti-American bias. In October 1991 Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, demanded that they respond to the CIA's allegations. The charges against them were refuted, and Powell dropped his inquiry, but by the summer of 1992 both men had been pushed out of Unscm.

The CIA was in a position to make demands because intelligence provided by the US played such an important role in the Unscm inspections. A pair of Iraqi defectors had provided the CIA with information about locations in Baghdad used to hide sensitive documents from the inspectors. A joint Unscm-IAEA inspection team was put together in a rush, the critical mission planning done not by the director of operations or the veteran INF chief inspector but by the CIA. The result was what's known as the 'parking lot incident': in September 1991, the inspection team seized thousands of documents, including some that provided clear evidence that Iraq had an undeclared nuclear weapons programme. The team was led by an aggressive IAEA inspector called David Kay, though it was not really an IAEA operation but a US one: the deputy chief inspector, the American diplomat Bob Gallucci, called most of the shots. 'The team,' Gallucci said in 2001, 'was very, very special ... we had a lot of team members with special skills, especially people who knew how to search buildings.' Gallucci recalled sitting with another inspector, who 'looked at the fellow who was driving the vehicle, who was one of our "special people", and he said to me: "He does not look like a physicist." And I said: "It's just because he has a really thick neck. Is that

what you're thinking?" And he said: "Yes, that ... and the crew cut. Where did you get him?" I answered: "Well, there was an ad in the *New York Times*." In fact, these 'special' team members, trained in 'close target reconnaissance' and 'surreptitious entry', worked for the Combat Applications Group and the Special Activities Division, better known as Delta Force and the CIA. And after the success of the parking lot incident the US relied on them to conduct all no notice inspections in Iraq. From the American perspective, Unscm now had a model of on-site inspection that worked.

I got my first taste of the realities of no notice inspections in December 1991 at a US-run briefing in an aircraft hangar in Bahrain. My notes from that day: 'The inspection is like a raid. Surprise, speed and decisive action will carry the day.' The instructor was a man of military bearing with a non-regulation haircut and facial hair, an expert in what he called 'sensitive site exploitation' – the art of rapidly entering and evaluating a room or structure for persons and materials of interest, and securing anything worthwhile. Other members of the team included a number of US paramilitary types, French Marine commandos, various British soldiers of fortune, and the odd rocket scientist, chemist, biologist and nuclear physicist. It could have been a casting call for Mad Max.

When we arrived in Iraq, our convoys of four-wheel-drive vehicles raced through city streets or across the desert, with sensor-laden helicopters and U-2 high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft above and high-resolution spy satellites providing further imagery. Later inspections included covert operators whose task was to intercept sensitive Iraqi communications, as well as networks of agents who reported on what was happening in and around the targeted areas. The parking lot incident was the template for these raid-like inspections: highly sensitive intelligence was released by the US on condition that the inspectors would protect the source and make

sure they surprised their targets.

But in the summer of 1996, the CIA used paramilitaries assigned to an Unscm inspection team to assist in a failed coup attempt against Saddam Hussein – an action which Unscm had no knowledge of, and would never have permitted – and from then on Bob Gallucci's special people were no longer made available by the US government. By this time, however, Unscm had significant experience in no notice inspections. By 1997 I had started to run a five-day Inspector Operations Course before each major inspection round. The techniques used in the raids themselves remained fundamentally unchanged, although some new tactics, such as the use of remote cameras, had been added. Team members were instructed in subjects ranging from cultural sensitivity ('Your behaviour must be beyond reproach at all times') to attitude ('You are the Alpha Dog'), along with training in site exploitation, document processing and tactical convoy driving.

Inspectors' résumés no longer listed work in places like Mogadishu, Khartoum or San Salvador, but rather involvement in Unscm missions that had often turned into intense confrontations between inspector and inspected. The change led to a new 'inspector culture' that was alien to all who weren't part of the tribe. A reporter from *Le Monde* observed this in action at the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, which served as the headquarters of the United Nations in Iraq: 'One lot wore jeans, knocked back cans of beer, played darts and put on deafening disco music. The other group wore ties, sipped gin and tonics, watched CNN news and tried to turn down the volume of the music.' Inspectors were derided by their humanitarian colleagues as 'cowboys', and the humanitarian workers were referred to by inspectors as 'bunny huggers'.

There's no doubt that the Unscm cowboys had a bit of an attitude, but it sprang from unfulfilled expectations, not arrogance. Each inspection began like a cup final, only to lose its excitement because of Iraqi obstruc-

In the summer of 1996, the CIA used paramilitaries assigned to an Unscm inspection team to assist in a failed coup attempt against Saddam Hussein – an action which Unscm had no knowledge of, and would never have permitted

The continued failure of Unscorm to uncover significant proscribed activities and material in Iraq, combined with the political fallout from the no notice inspections, caused Unscorm's collapse in 1998

tionism, external political interference (usually from the US) or Security Council ambivalence – sometimes all three. Team morale remained high, but cynicism crept in: our theme song was U2's 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For', and every laptop had a copy of a clip from the movie *Spaceballs* ('Find anything yet? We ain't found shit!') that was played at the end of each day, as we returned empty-handed to prepare our daily reports.

During my seven years as an Unscorm inspector, I worked with the CIA, the Israeli Aman, the Dutch BVD and the German BND. But my closest relationship was with British intelligence. From 1991 to 1996, our dealings were managed through Operation Rockingham, a Defence Intelligence Service organisation that served as a clearing-house for all the intelligence support provided to Unscorm by the UK. By 1996 most of Unscorm's leads had dried up and my need for actionable information was such that the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) agreed to deal with me directly. The SIS assigned me a codename – Dark Knight – for use in our correspondence (Richard Butler, Unscorm's executive chairman, was Dark Prince).

The sites for Unscorm inspections were originally determined by declarations made by Iraq. In the first statements it provided to the UN, in April 1991, it underestimated its holdings of chemical weapons and ballistic missiles, and failed to acknowledge either a biological or nuclear weapons programme. Unscorm was forced to turn to member governments for new intelligence to make up for the information shortfall. The inspection process temporarily revived: information from a defector led to the parking lot incident, which exposed the existence of the country's nuclear weapons programme; satellite imagery detected a still existing covert missile force; and contracts that documented the purchase of complex growth media for propagating bacteria compelled Iraq to admit it had a biological weapons programme. But even this intel-

ligence had a 'use by' date. What was lacking was a source inside Iraq who could update the information provided by defectors. The CIA refused to discuss the agents it might be able to help Unscorm. SIS was much more accommodating, especially after a meeting I attended at its headquarters in Vauxhall in August 1997. Debriefing reports coming out of the gateway office in Bahrain had highlighted the name of a Special Republican Guard officer who had had contact with the inspection team. It happened that this officer had been in contact with relatives in England, and had expressed dissatisfaction with life in Iraq. SIS had assigned him the codename Ultimate Goal, but since it no longer had a presence inside Iraq, the recruitment effort had gone nowhere.

Enter Unscorm. At Vauxhall the SIS official responsible for the Middle East (I'll call him 'the Don') approached me about a matter of great sensitivity. It was my inspection team that had made contact with Ultimate Goal, and I'd spent a significant amount of time questioning him about his role in concealing material from Unscorm. 'Could you arrange for another inspection of his office?' the Don asked. I told him that I could. The Don then introduced me to an Arabic-speaking junior officer (the Junior Executive), and we hatched a plan. I would get the Junior Executive into Ultimate Goal's office, and then create a distraction while the Junior Executive conducted a quick assessment of the situation before deciding whether or not to place in Ultimate Goal's desk instructions on how to make contact with SIS. I ran this by my boss, Richard Butler, when I returned to New York, and to my surprise he signed off on the proposal without any debate. The next month, the Junior Executive gained access to Ultimate Goal while I kept his colleagues busy. I don't know what the result of the mission was. 'We won't be able to tell you if this worked or not,' the Don had told me. 'What I can promise you is that if and when we get information that is of use to you and your team, you will get it.'

The continued failure of Unscm to uncover significant proscribed activities and material in Iraq, combined with the political fallout from the no notice inspections, caused Unscm's collapse in 1998. SIS played a role in the final drama: an agent in Iraq provided information about ballistic missile components hidden in a Baath Party property in Baghdad. The site was due to be inspected in August 1998, but the mission was aborted after the Iraqis ceased all co-operation with Unscm. In December 1998 Unscm tried again to inspect it, prompting a confrontation with Iraq that led to the withdrawal of Unscm and to Operation Desert Fox, a 72-hour aerial assault by the US and the UK. Unscm inspectors never returned. In September 2002, I went back to Iraq to film a documentary about disarmament and visited the Baath Party property in question. The SIS report contained errors in critical details about its layout, bringing into question the source's credibility; it's unlikely anything would have been found had an inspection gone ahead.

Unmovic, the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, was created by the UN Security Council in December 1999. It was designed to be different from its predecessor, staffed by employees paid by, and ostensibly loyal to, the UN; Unscm had used 'experts on mission' loaned from its member governments. Each inspector was required to attend a month-long course of instruction; in February 2003 Unmovic's executive chairman, Hans Blix, told attendees at one such course that there would be 'detailed lectures about various Iraqi weapons programmes, about the result of past inspections, about the craft and tools of inspection, the rights and duties of inspectors in Iraq and about the history, culture and religions of Iraq'. An Unmovic inspector, he said, should be 'driving and dynamic – but not angry and aggressive'; 'ingenious – but not deceptive'; 'keeping some distance – but not arrogant or pompous'. Between its creation and the return of inspectors to Iraq in November 2002

Unmovic had nearly three years to prepare. Once on the ground, it conducted 750 inspections at 550 sites. Most of them were routine, familiarising Unmovic inspectors to sites already inspected by Unscm. But there were also no notice inspections of sites that hadn't been inspected before, based on intelligence provided by supporting governments. The vast majority of these inspections produced no results: the intelligence was either wrong or out of date. But on one occasion it was dead-on: the inspection of the home of Fazel Hassan Hamza, a scientist who in the 1980s had conducted work related to the laser separation of radioisotopes. A cache of three thousand documents was discovered, most of which related directly to Hamza's work with lasers. It looked as if the Unmovic model had succeeded where Unscm had failed.

Inspectors have remained tight-lipped about the tip that led to the inspection of Hamza's house. The British government's 'Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction' (better known as the Butler Review), published in July 2004, attributes the intelligence to the UK, and most likely to SIS. According to the Butler Review, SIS had six agents in Iraq at the time. (I can't ascertain if one of them was Ultimate Goal.) The nuclear-related reporting appeared to come from two of these sources, both termed 'new', neither of whom had direct experience in current WMD programmes. The British were more reticent about sharing human intelligence sources with Unmovic than they had been with Unscm. Unmovic's new 'independent' profile meant it was willing only to receive information.

Unmovic's point of contact for receiving foreign intelligence, the Canadian ex-intelligence officer Jim Corcoran, was cleared to handle sensitive information, but SIS was less confident about the rest of the Unmovic staff or its procedures for transmitting sensitive data into Iraq. When Corcoran met with SIS, they insisted that intelligence had to be carried into Iraq by hand, and that knowledge of each report had to be limited to as few people

When Corcoran met with SIS, they insisted that intelligence had to be carried into Iraq by hand, and that knowledge of each report had to be limited to as few people as possible

The Iranians claim that a series of files the IAEA obtained in 2008 which appear to show that Iran had conducted some nuclear weapons development in 2002 and 2003 are fake

as possible. Two inspectors – Kay Mereish, a retired US colonel who had worked at the Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases in Maryland, and Martin Fosbrook, a British biologist – flew back to New York so that Corcoran could brief them, along with Dimitri Perricos, a veteran IAEA inspector who served as chief inspector for this mission, in a secure space, precluding any need for conversation in Iraq of a sort that shouldn't be overheard. On 14 January the three inspectors returned to Baghdad. Two days later they inspected Faleh Hamza's house.

On the morning of 16 January 2003 a convoy of white UN vehicles left the Canal Hotel, accompanied by their Iraqi minders in a hotchpotch of civilian vehicles. The convoy crossed the Tigris and arrived in Ghazaliyah, a neighbourhood in west Baghdad, just after nine in the morning. As well as Hamza's house, the inspectors raided the house of his next-door neighbour, Shakir al-Jibouri, another Iraqi nuclear scientist. Both men were at work, and only their wives and children were at home. The inspectors waited outside for hours while their Iraqi minders tracked down the two scientists and brought them home. Then the inspections began. The documents were found in a wooden box in a cupboard upstairs in Hamza's house, and Perricos ordered Mereish to take them into Unmovic custody.

The Iraqi government protested and a compromise was struck: Hamza would accompany the documents to the Canal Hotel, where they would be copied by the inspectors in his presence, and he would receive a complete copy. The process took hours, and Hamza claims that at one point he was separated from his Iraqi minder and approached by a female Unmovic inspector who offered to take him and his wife out of Iraq so that he could talk to the inspectors without fear of reprisal. Hamza refused, and later complained to the press about the inspectors' 'mafia tactics'.

Blix used the seized documents to remonstrate with the Iraqis; he said that they rep-

resented 'a sign that not everything has been declared'. Colin Powell, then secretary of state, cited the documents as 'dramatic confirmation' that Saddam was concealing evidence and not co-operating with the inspections. Unnamed Western diplomats went further, and said the documents showed there was 'ongoing work taking place in Iraq to develop nuclear weapons'. The Iraqi government publicly criticised Unmovic for inspecting a private residence, called the seized documents 'private papers', and claimed that their contents were already known to the inspectors, and had nothing to do with the Iraqi nuclear programme.

On 14 February Mohammed El Baradei, then the director general of the IAEA, said that the Hamza documents 'provided some additional details about Iraq's laser enrichment development efforts', but 'refer to activities or sites already known to the IAEA and appear to be the personal files of the scientist in whose home they were found. Nothing contained in the documents alters the conclusions previously drawn by the IAEA concerning the extent of Iraq's laser enrichment programme.' In short, the Unmovic version of the no notice inspection accomplished nothing of significance but contributed to an already confused story. On the eve of an American-led war that used Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as its *raison d'être*, the results of the inspections proved disastrous.

The history of no notice inspections in Iraq does not bode well for their use in Iran. Such inspections are intelligence-based exercises. The bulk of the intelligence underpinning the US concerns over 'possible military dimensions' comes from the 'alleged studies' documents – a series of files the IAEA obtained in 2008 which appear to show that Iran had conducted some nuclear weapons development in 2002 and 2003. Their credibility has often been called into question and the Iranians declare they are fake. There's good cause, too, to believe that much of the remaining intelligence

buttressing the CIA's case against Iran is flawed. The strange tale of the Iranian physicist Shahram Amiri, whose defection the CIA facilitated in the spring of 2009, serves as a case in point. Amiri was for several years before his defection an American agent-in-place whose reporting was used by the CIA in formulating its assessments on Iran. But his re-defection to Iran in 2010 suggests that he may have been a double agent, calling into question all his reporting to the CIA, before and after his defection. Operation Merlin, in which the CIA attempted to pass on to Iran flawed designs for a nuclear weapon, further undermines the CIA's credibility as a source of information about an alleged Iranian nuclear weapons programme.

If they were permitted, where would no notice inspections in Iran take place? There are two sites that the IAEA has publicly declared to be of interest. The first is Parchin, a military facility associated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Command. The IAEA was granted a 'managed access' inspection of the facility in 2005, and found nothing. In 2007, the IAEA claimed to have received new information linking Parchin to a test of a neutron initiator, the device which starts fission in a nuclear warhead, and asked to visit the site again. Iran has refused on the grounds that the basis for such an inspection is flawed.

Robert Kelley, a former IAEA inspector, agreed: 'The allegations that Iran carried out hydrodynamic experiments related to nuclear explosives in a large steel containment vessel [at Parchin] have questionable technical credibility.' Parchin is a sensitive military facility, and Iran fears that giving inspectors access would lead to an intelligence-driven fishing expedition. The other site of interest is in Marivan, where the IAEA contends that Iran conducted large-scale explosive tests of a multi-point initiation system, which is used to initiate nuclear fission, and in doing so to activate the neutron initiator, in a weapon. The source of this allegation appears to be what

Iran justifiably claims is a set of forged documents. In 2014, Iran offered to let the IAEA conduct another 'managed access' on-site inspection of Marivan; the IAEA declined.

'You can't hang your hat on a single issue,' Garry Dillon, the former head of the IAEA's Action Team in Iraq, told me in October 1998. 'By insisting on investigating every minor discrepancy, regardless of the bigger picture, you're putting process ahead of substance. In the end, all you'll be doing is chasing ghosts.' He was right. In Iraq, the inspection process became a vehicle for creating confrontations that undermined international confidence in Baghdad's willingness to abide by its disarmament obligation. When Iraq finally told the truth about its weapons programmes, no one believed it. We used to joke about how often we came back from an inspection empty-handed, repeating the saying that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

The intelligence about the 'possible military dimensions' of Iran's nuclear programme is of questionable provenance and most of it is more than a dozen years old. The consequences of failure to reach a nuclear accord with Iran today are too serious for the world to embrace a process that has been so controversial while having so little impact on legitimate disarmament. This is especially true when the inspected party, as is the case with Iran, has agreed to implement stringent verification measures and has a proven track record of abiding by them. Iran has been put in the impossible position of having to prove a negative. If it accepts inspections based on allegations it knows to be baseless, then it's opening itself up to an endless cycle of foreign intrusion into its military and security infrastructure, and the inability of inspectors to discover something of relevance will only reinforce the belief that something is being hidden. We saw this happen before in Iraq, and the end result was a war based on flawed intelligence and baseless accusations that left many thousands dead and a region in turmoil.

CT

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Scott Ritter is a former intelligence officer with the United States Marine Corps. From 1991-98, he served as a Chief Inspector for the UN in Iraq, where he led inspections to find weapons of mass destruction. This essay originally appeared in the *London Review of Books* – <http://lr.b.co.uk>

Iran nuke deal resets Eurasia's 'Great Game'

Pepe Escobar tells how Obama's historic deal could be an international game-changer – but there's still a long way to go

Iran – supported by Russia and China – has finally, successfully, called the long, winding 12-year-long Atlanticist bluff on its 'nuclear weapons'

This is it. It is indeed historic. And diplomacy eventually wins. In terms of the New Great Game in Eurasia, and the ongoing tectonic shifts reorganizing Eurasia, this is huge: Iran – supported by Russia and China – has finally, successfully, called the long, winding 12-year-long Atlanticist bluff on its “nuclear weapons.”

And this only happened because the Obama administration needed

1) a lone foreign policy success, and

2) a go at trying to influence at least laterally the onset of the new Eurasia-centered geopolitical order.

So here it is – the 159-page, as detailed as possible, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); the actual P5+1/Iran nuclear deal. As Iranian diplomats have stressed, the JCPOA will be presented to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which will then adopt a resolution within seven to ten days making it an official international document.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has described the deal – significantly – as a “win-win” solution. But not perfect: “I believe this is a historic moment. We are

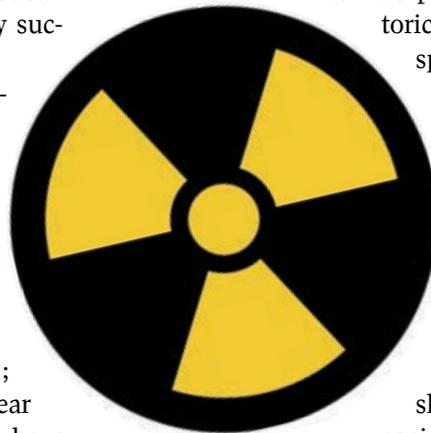
reaching an agreement that is not perfect for anybody but is what we could accomplish. Today could have been the end of hope, but now we are starting a new chapter of hope.”

Zarif also had to stress – correctly – this was a long-sought solution for an “unnecessary crisis”; the politicization – essentially by the US – of a scientific, technical dossier.

Germany's Foreign Minister Steinmeier, for his part, was euphoric; “A historic day! We leave 35 years of speechlessness + more than 12 years of a dangerous conflict behind us.”

Looking ahead, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani tweeted now there can be “a focus on shared challenges” – referring to the real fight that NATO, and Iran, should pursue together; against the fake Caliphate of ISIS/ISIL/Daesh, whose ideological matrix is intolerant Wahhabism and whose attacks are directed against both Shi'ites and westerners.

Right on cue, Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed the deal will contribute to fighting terrorism in the Middle East, not to mention “assisting in strengthening global and regional security, global nuclear non-



proliferation” and – perhaps wishful thinking? – “the creation in the Middle East of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed the deal “fully corresponds” with Russia’s negotiating points. The fact is no deal would have been possible without extensive Russian involvement – and the Obama administration knows it (but cannot admit it publicly).

The real problem started when Lavrov added that Moscow expects the cancellation of Washington’s missile defense plans, after the Iran deal proves that Tehran is not, and won’t be, a nuclear “threat.”

There’s the rub. The Pentagon simply won’t cancel an essential part of its Full Spectrum Dominance military doctrine simply because of mere “diplomacy.” Every security analyst not blinded by ideology knows that missile defense was never about Iran, but about Russia. The Pentagon’s new military review still states – not by accident – major Eurasian players Iran, China and Russia as “threats” to US national security.

Now from the brighter side on Iran-Russia relations. Trade is bound to increase, especially in nanotechnology, machinery parts and agriculture. And on the all-pervasive energy front, Iran will indeed compete with Russia in major markets such as Turkey and soon Western Europe, but there’s plenty of leeway for Gazprom and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) to coordinate their market share. NIOC executive Mohsen Qamsari advances that Iran will prioritize exporting to Asia, and will try to regain the at least 42% of the European market share that it had before sanctions.

Compared to so many uplifting perspectives, Washington’s reaction was quite pedestrian. US President Barack Obama preferred to stress – correctly – that every pathway to an Iranian nuclear weapon has been cut off. And he vowed to veto any legislation in the US Congress that blocks the deal. When I was in Vienna last month I had surefire con-

firmation – from a European source – that the Obama administration feels confident it has the votes it needs in Capitol Hill.

And what about all that oil?

Tariq Rauf, former Head of Verification and Security Policy at the IAEA and currently Director of the Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Program at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), hailed the deal as “the most significant multilateral nuclear agreement in two decades – the last such agreement was the 1996 nuclear test ban treaty.” Rauf even advanced that the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize should go to US Secretary of State Jon Kerry and Iran’s Foreign Minister Zarif.

Rebuilding trust between the US and Iran, though, will be a long and winding road.

Tehran agreed to a 15-year moratorium on enriching uranium beyond 3.67 percent; this means it has agreed to reduce its enrichment capacity by two-thirds. Only Natanz will conduct enrichment; and Fordo, additionally, won’t store fissile material.

Iran agreed to store no more than 300 kg of low-enriched uranium – a 96% reduction compared to current levels. The Arak reactor will be reconfigured, and won’t be used to produce plutonium. The spent fuel will be handled by an international team.

The IAEA and Iran signed a roadmap in Tehran that was already decided in Vienna. By December 15, all past and present outstanding issues – that amount to 12 items – should be clarified, and the IAEA will deliver a final assessment. IAEA access to the Parchin military site – always a very contentious issue – is part of a separate arrangement.

Sticking point

One of the major sticking points in Vienna was solved – with Tehran allowing UN inspectors to visit virtually any site. But it may object to a particular visit. A Joint Commission – the P5+1 + Iran – will be able to override any objections with a simple majority

There won’t be American inspectors – shades of the run-up towards the war on Iraq; only from countries with diplomatic relations with Iran

“Saudi Arabia spends 13 times more money on its defense than Iran does. But somehow Iran, and not Saudi Arabia, is seen by the US as the potential aggressor”

vote. After that Iran has three days to comply – in case it loses the vote. There won’t be American inspectors – shades of the run-up towards the war on Iraq; only from countries with diplomatic relations with Iran.

So implementation of the deal will take at least the next five months. Sanctions will be lifted only by early 2016.

What’s certain is that Iran will become a magnet for foreign investment. Major western and Asian multinationals are already positioned to start cracking this practically virgin market with over 70 million people, including a very well educated middle class. There will be a boom in sectors such as consumer electronics, the auto industry and hospitality and leisure.

And then there’s, once again, oil. Iran has as much as a whopping 50 million barrels of oil stored at sea – and that’s about ready to hit the global market. The purchaser of choice will be, inevitably, China – as the West remains mired in recession. Iran’s first order of work is to regain lost market share to Persian Gulf producers. Yet the trend is for oil prices to go down – so Iran cannot count on much profit in the short to medium term.

Now for a real war on terror?

Arms embargo

The conventional arms embargo on Iran essentially stays, for five years. That’s absurd, compared to Israel and the House of Saud arming themselves to their teeth.

Last May the US Congress approved a \$1.9 billion arms sale to Israel. That includes 50 BLU-113 bunker-buster bombs – to do what? Bomb Natanz? – and 3,000 Hellfire missiles. As for Saudi Arabia, according to SIPRI, the House of Saud spent a whopping \$80 billion on weapons last year; more than nuclear powers France or Britain. The House of Saud is waging an – illegal – war on Yemen.

Qatar is not far behind. It clinched an \$11 billion deal to buy Apache helicopters and Javelin and Patriot air defense systems, and is bound to buy loads of F-15 fighters.

Trita Parsi, president of the National American-Iranian Council, went straight to the point: “Saudi Arabia spends 13 times more money on its defense than Iran does. But somehow Iran, and not Saudi Arabia, is seen by the US as the potential aggressor.”

So, whatever happens, expect tough days ahead. Two weeks ago, Foreign Minister Zarif told a small group of independent journalists in Vienna, including this correspondent, that the negotiations would be a success because the US and Iran had agreed on “no humiliation of one another.” He stressed he paid “a high domestic price for not blaming the Americans,” and he praised Kerry as “a reasonable man.” But he was wary of the US establishment, which to a great extent, according to his best information, was dead set against the lifting of sanctions.

Zarif also praised the Russian idea that after a deal, it will be time to form a real counter-terrorism coalition, featuring Americans, Iranians, Russians, Chinese and Europeans – even as Putin and Obama had agreed to work together on “regional issues.” And Iranian diplomacy was giving signs that the Obama administration had finally understood that the alternative to Assad in Syria was ISIS/ISIL/Daesh, not the “Free” Syrian Army.

That degree of collaboration, post-Wall of Mistrust, remains to be seen. Then it will be possible to clearly evaluate whether the Obama administration has made a major strategic decision, and whether “normalizing” its relation with Iran involves much more than meets the eye.

Pepe Escobar’s new book, just out, is “Empire of Chaos”. He is also the author of “Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War” (Nimble Books, 2007), “Red Zone Blues: a snapshot of Baghdad during the surge” (Nimble Books, 2007), and “Obama does Globalistan: (Nimble Books, 2009

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Hillary's emails: missing the story

CM Hallinan tells how the French intelligence services plotted to overthrow Libyan leader in attempt to grab oil production and help French businesses

“The DGSE officers indicated that they expected the new government of Libya to favor French firms and national interests, particularly regarding the oil industry in Libya”

The Congressional harrying of former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton over emails concerning the 2012 death of an American Ambassador and three staff members in Benghazi, Libya, has become a sort of running joke, with Republicans claiming “cover-up” and Democrats dismissing the whole matter as nothing more than election year politics. But there is indeed a story embedded in the emails, one that is deeply damning of American and French actions in the Libyan civil war, from secretly funding the revolt against Muammar Gaddafi, to the willingness to use journalism as a cover for covert action.

The latest round of emails came to light last month in a fit of Republican pique over Clinton's prevarications concerning whether she solicited intelligence from her advisor, journalist and former aide to President Bill Clinton, Sidney Blumenthal. If most newspaper readers rolled their eyes at this point and decided to check out the ball scores, one can hardly blame them.

But that would be a big mistake.

While the emails do raise questions about Hillary Clinton's veracity, the real story is how French intelligence plotted to overthrow the Libyan leader in order to claim a hefty slice of Libya's oil production and “favorable consideration” for French businesses.

The courier in this cynical undertaking was journalist and rightwing philosopher

Bernard Henri-Levy, a man who has yet to see a civil war that he doesn't advocate intervening in, from Yugoslavia to Syria. According to Julian Pecquet, the US congressional correspondent for the Turkish publication Al-Monitor, Henri-Levy claims he got French President Nicolas Sarkozy to back the Benghazi-based Libyan Transitional National Council that was quietly being funded by the General Directorate for External Security (DGSE), the French CIA.

According to the memos, in return for money and support, “the DGSE officers indicated that they expected the new government of Libya to favor French firms and national interests, particularly regarding the oil industry in Libya.” The memo says that the two leaders of the Council, Mustafa Abdul Jalil and General Abdul Fatah Younis, “accepted this offer.”

Another May 5 email indicates that French humanitarian flights to Benghazi included officials of the French oil company TOTAL, and representatives of construction firms and defense contractors, who secretly met with Council members and then “discreetly” traveled by road to Egypt, protected by DGSE agents.

Henri-Levy, an inveterate publicity hound, claims to have come up with this quid pro quo, business/regime change scheme, using “his status as a journalist to provide cover for his activities.” Given that journalists are

routinely accused of being “foreign agents” in places like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Afghanistan, Henri-Levy’s subterfuge endangers other members of the media trying to do their jobs.

All this clandestine maneuvering paid off.

On Feb. 26, 2011, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1970 aimed at establishing “peace and security” and protecting the civilian population in the Libyan civil war. Or at least that was how UNR 1970 was sold to countries on the Security Council, like South Africa, Brazil, India, China and Russia, that had initial doubts. However, the French, Americans and British – along with several NATO allies – saw the resolution as an opportunity to overthrow Qaddafi and in France’s case, to get back in the game as a force in the region.

Almost before the ink was dry on the resolution, France, Britain and the US began systematically bombing Qaddafi’s armed forces, ignoring pleas by the African Union to look for a peaceful way to resolve the civil war. According to one memo, President Sarkozy “plans to have France lead the attacks on [Qaddafi] over an extended period of time” and “sees this situation as an opportunity for France to reassert itself as a military power.”

While for France flexing its muscles was an important goal, Al-Monitor says that a September memo also shows that “Sarkozy urged the Libyans to reserve 35 percent of their oil industry for French firms – TOTAL in particular – when he traveled to Tripoli that month.” In the end, Libya imploded and Paris has actually realized little in the way of oil, but France’s military industrial complex has done extraordinarily well in the aftermath of Qaddafi’s fall.

According to Defense Minister Jean-Yves Loday, French arms sales increased 42 percent from 2012, bringing in \$7 billion, and are expected to top almost \$8 billion in 2014.

Over the past decade, France, the former colonial masters of Lebanon, Syria, and Algeria, has been sidelined by US and British

arms sales to the Middle East. But the Libya war has turned that around. Since then, Paris has carefully courted Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates by taking a hard line on the Iran nuclear talks.

The global security analyst group Stratfor noted in 2013, “France could gain financially from the GCC’s [Gulf Cooperation Council, the organization representing the oil monarchies of the Persian Gulf] frustrations over recent US policy in the Middle East. Significant defense contracts worth tens of billions of dollars are up for grabs in the Gulf region, ranging from aircraft to warships to missile systems. France is predominantly competing with Britain and the United States for the contracts and is seeking to position itself as a key ally of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as it looks to strengthen its defense and industrial ties in the region.”

Sure enough, the French company Thalès landed a \$3.34 billion Saudi contract to upgrade the kingdom’s missile system and France just sold 24 Rafale fighters to Qatar for \$7 billion. Discussions are underway with the UAE concerning the Rafale, and France sold 24 of the fighters to Egypt for \$5.8 billion. France has also built a military base in the UAE.

French President Francois Hollande, along with his Foreign and Defense ministers, attended the recent GCC meeting, and, according to Hollande, there are 20 projects worth billions of dollars being discussed with Saudi Arabia. While he was in Qatar, Hollande gave a hard-line talk on Iran and guaranteed “that France is there for its allies when it is called upon.”

True to his word, France has thrown up one obstacle after another during the talks between Iran and the P5 + 1 – the permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany.

Paris also supports Saudi Arabia and it sallies in their bombing war on Yemen, and strongly backs the Saudi-Turkish led overthrow of the government of Bashar al-

France, Britain and the US began systematically bombing Qaddafi’s armed forces, ignoring pleas by the African Union to look for a peaceful way to resolve the civil war

FRENCH KISS

The collapse of Libya was a particularly catastrophic event, which – as the African Union accurately predicted – sent a flood of arms and unrest into two continents

Assad in Syria, even though it means that the French are aligning themselves with al-Qaeda linked extremist groups.

France seems to have its finger in every Middle East disaster, although, to be fair, it is hardly alone. Britain and the US also played major roles in the Libya war, and the Obama administration is deep into the ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen. In the latter case, Washington supplies the Saudis with weapons, targeting intelligence, and in-air refueling of its fighter-bombers.

But the collapse of Libya was a particularly catastrophic event, which – as the African Union accurately predicted – sent a flood of arms and unrest into two continents.

The wars in Mali and Niger are a direct repercussion of Qaddafi's fall, and the extremist Boko Haram in Nigeria appears to have benefited from the plundering of Libyan arms depots. Fighters and weapons from Libya have turned up in the ranks of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. And the gun-

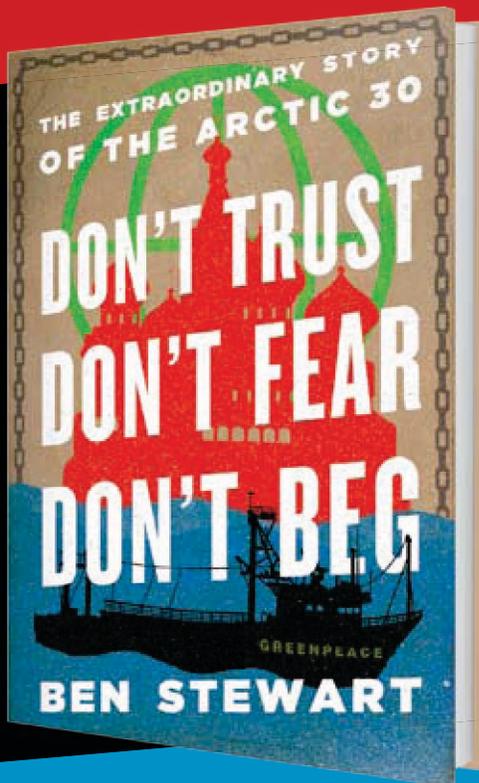
men who killed 22 museum visitors in Tunisia last March, and 38 tourists on a beach July 3, trained with extremists in Libya before carrying out their deadly attacks.

Clinton was aware of everything the French were up to and apparently had little objection to the cold-blooded cynicism behind Paris's policies in the region.

The "news" in the Benghazi emails, according to the *New York Times*, is that, after denying it, Clinton may indeed have solicited advice from Blumenthal. The story ends with a piece of petty gossip: Clinton wanted to take credit for Qaddafi's fall, but the White House stole the limelight by announcing the Libyan leader's death first. **CT**

That's all the news that's fit to print?

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Conn M. Hallinan is a columnist for *Foreign Policy In Focus*, "A Think Tank Without Walls," and an independent journalist. He is a winner of a Project Censored "Real News Award," and lives in Berkeley, California



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But what about the children?

Amanda Cahill-Ripley says Britain's new welfare cuts breach the country's human rights obligations

"A brighter, more secure future"? "All in this together"? With George Osborne's latest round of extreme welfare cuts now laid out, these grand claims are ringing more hollow than ever.

The Conservative government's recent budget will certainly have a lasting effect and legacy, but not just on the deficit. It will affect millions of vulnerable people, including children, who will be forced deeper into poverty and reliance on charitable concerns such as food banks.

The specific cuts announced by the chancellor include a further reduction to the benefits cap – not only from £26,000 to £23,000 as promised in the Conservative Party's 2015 manifesto, but down further to £20,000 outside London. Child tax credits, housing benefits and working tax credits will be reduced, with child tax credit only being paid for the first two children.

These moves are particularly controversial, since the benefits cap was purportedly meant to "reward work". In Osborne's Britain, as he reiterated while delivering the budget, hard work is supposedly the best route out of poverty – but cutting the incomes of families who work for already low wages directly contradicts that aim. Osborne has nonetheless argued that the £12 billion cuts to welfare are needed to make sure "work pays" and that "we give a fair deal for those on welfare and a fair deal to

the people, the taxpayers of this country who pay for it."

Evidence to the contrary is not hard to find. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the shortfall between those on low incomes and the weekly cost of a decent standard of living is growing. On child tax credit, the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that reducing the Child Tax Credit child element to its original 2003-04 level (adjusted for inflation) will increase relative child poverty by about 300,000 (or 2.5 percentage points). Current figures put the number of children already in poverty at 3.5m.

In relation to hunger, figures released in April 2015 by the Trussell Trust show that more than 1m people received three days' food from Trussell Trust food banks, compared to 900,000 last year. This figure includes almost 400,000 children. Compare these figures to the 346,992 in 2012-13 and 26,000 who accessed food banks in 2008-09 and the increasing scale of food poverty becomes horribly evident.

I can only imagine how these welfare cuts are going to affect food poverty throughout the UK. What's clear is that the people these cuts will hit the hardest are the most vulnerable in our society – those on low incomes, children, single parents, large families and those with disabilities.

We can argue about the political and moral reasoning for such cuts, but the legal implica-

In Osborne's Britain hard work is supposedly the best route out of poverty – but cutting the incomes of families who work for already low wages directly contradicts that aim

WELFARE CUTS

These austerity measures and impending welfare cuts are not only a deliberate attack on the poor; they represent a serious failure to comply with Britain's legal international human rights obligations

tions of such policies are often forgotten. If we assess the situation from a legal human rights perspective, the UK government is showing blatant disregard for legal obligations it signed up to long ago.

Even leaving aside the question of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act, the UK has ratified both the UN International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN ICESCR) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC). Both these legally binding treaties oblige the government to realise “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing.”

The UN CRC requires that governments “recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” and recognise that “every child [has] the right to benefit from social security”.

While neither of these conventions have been directly incorporated into British law, the state is nonetheless bound at international level to honour their duties.

It is also true that human rights law provides special protections for the most vulnerable – exactly the people who will be most seriously affected by these cuts.

Even the Cameron government’s own advisers have warned it about the cuts’ impact on children. The report of the UK Children’s Commissioners to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, published in July 2015, pulls no punches:

“Response to the global economic downturn, including the imposition of austerity measures and changes to the welfare system, has resulted in a failure to protect the most disadvantaged children and those in especially vulnerable groups from child poverty, preventing the realisation of their rights under Articles 26 and 27 [of the UN CRC] ... Reductions to household income for poorer children as a result of tax, transfer and social security benefit changes have led to food and fuel poverty, and the sharply increased use of crisis

food bank provision by families.”

Likewise, the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights recently reported on the UK’s compliance with the UN CRC, and found it falling well short: “Welfare cuts will ensure that the government is not in compliance with its international human rights obligations to realise a right to an adequate standard of living under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESR) and a child’s right to an adequate standard of living under Article 27 of the UN CRC. Further it will be in breach of the statutory target to eliminate child poverty contained in the Child Poverty Act 2010.”

Hence the well-timed change to the definition of child poverty, something Iain Duncan Smith and the Department for Work and Pensions have been trying to bring about for a long time. The overriding consequences of these cuts will be more of what we’ve already seen: a rise in child poverty, food poverty and fuel poverty. This is not a matter of choice. People turn to food banks “as a last resort, when other coping strategies have failed. Deciding to seek help from a food bank can be difficult, embarrassing and shameful.”

As such, the increasing use of food banks to substitute the role of the state in protecting the most vulnerable in society is not only a violation of the right to food and the right to an adequate standard of living. It is fundamentally a violation of the most essential right: the right to live one’s life in dignity.

The fact that the third sector is doing a fantastic job dealing with food poverty (as well as the housing crisis and fuel poverty) – albeit only touching the tip of the iceberg – does not mean that charities should replace the role of the state.

Clearly, these austerity measures and now the impending welfare cuts are not only a deliberate attack on the poor; they represent a serious failure to comply with Britain’s legal international human rights obligations. This government has taken depressing backwards steps in terms of realising core economic and social rights. **CT**

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Amanda Cahill-Ripley is a lecturer in law at Lancaster University in England. This article originally appeared at <http://theconversation.com>

President Trump to Xi and Putin: 'You're fired!'

A poem by **Philip Kraske**

I was glad to see Donald Trump's gonna run,
To lend the race drama, great flair and some fun,
With his big ideas whose time has sure come,
Since he has a dream and not crap humdrum.
For campaign gravitas has of late gotten lame,
With Ben Carson, Ted Cruz and Jeb! (no surname).

The Don gave his talk and promised to return,
America its greatness, my biggest concern.
Greatness, you know, can be lost like keys,
Like a ball losing air or flowers their bees,
Turning the country into a big Cameroon,
Which far as I know put no man on the moon.

I particular liked his push for a wall,
Along the Mex border to keep down the squall,
Of mariachi bands and ladies in labor,
And paid for by Mexies like a good neighbor.
That's called vision in Century Twenty-One,
Joining Reagan and Cesar with Atilla the Hun.

Abroad our enemies will turn pussycat,
As The Donald to them will take a big bat,
Push them around and show them what's greatness,
Bully them to respect us without any hateness.
And if Putin or Xi of him dare get tired,
Don's just the one to tell them, "You're fired!"

Finally! This prince after we've kissed every toad,
To take superpowerdom out on the road.
He's just what we need: a non-politician,
Neither tub-thumper nor thoughtful patrician.
But a billionaire leader as nobody's been,
Who'll buy our country its greatness again

CT

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Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation. His four novels, of varied plots but centering on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009. His web site is <http://philipkraske.com>

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Sunset of the empire

Columbian defiance of the 'War on Drugs' shows how US influence in Latin America is plunging, writes **Jeff Nygaard**

"Plan Columbia' was considered an outstanding success by the State Department, but an unmitigated disaster by others

The *New York Times* headline on May 15th read, "Defying US, Colombia Ends a Drug Tactic." The tactic to which they refer has long formed a part of the Clinton-era anti-drug program known as "Plan Colombia." That's the Plan which the Obama State Department considers an "outstanding success story" and human rights defenders consider "an unmitigated disaster," according to a recent article by the North American Congress on Latin America, or NACLA.

Part of the larger "War on Drugs," which was declared by Richard Nixon in 1971, Plan Colombia included a regime of aerial spraying of coca fields, apparently based on the long-discredited idea that such "supply reduction" would somehow reduce cocaine use in the United States. This despite the numerous studies which show that "supply-side eradication efforts almost always fail to reduce the supply of drugs or rates of drug use."

There was a time when most countries in the Western Hemisphere would do as they were told by the United States, even when what they were told to do was poisoning their people and increasing violence in their homeland. That's how Empire works. But now, as the Drug Policy Alliance noted in a 2014 article, there is a "growing defiance across Latin America at decades of US-driven, militarized drug policy and its devastating consequences for the region." More evidence of this defi-

ance rolls in every day, as this news item from the middle of May illustrates.

As reported by the *Times* and many others, what happened in May was that Colombia announced that it would stop the aerial spraying of the chemical glyphosate. Glyphosate is the active (and carcinogenic) ingredient in the Monsanto product known as RoundUp, which has been the main (perhaps the only) herbicide used in the coca-eradication campaign. RoundUp is the world's most widely used herbicide, in part due to the demand from the Colombian spraying. Perhaps all of this has something to do with the fact that Monsanto, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, "consistently outspends all other agribusiness companies and interest groups" in its Washington lobbying efforts.

The *Times* comments that "The decision [to ban glyphosate] ends a program that has continued for more than two decades, raising questions about the viability of long-accepted strategies in the war on drugs in the region."

What it really raises questions about is the ability of the US to call the shots in the hemisphere. Indeed, the *Times* notes that "Before Thursday's decision, the United States had pressed the Colombian government to continue the spraying program." In the old days, that would have done the trick. These are not the old days.

It's not just Colombia, either. An article from June 2014 in NACLA's Report on the

Americas puts the recent Colombian decision in context:

“Since President Nixon first declared the War on Drugs over 40 years ago, the US government has used its political and economic muscle to dictate policies throughout the region. Now the tables have turned as Latin American countries have emerged as a driving force. Numerous factors have contributed to the waning influence of Washington on this and other policies. The surge in left-leaning governments in countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia has challenged Washington’s historic patterns of unilateralism and interventionism. The growing economic influence of Brazil, the economic recession in the United States, and the decline of US foreign assistance have all contributed to this trend. Interestingly, the reformist leanings on drug policy do not break down on ideological grounds, with Guatemala’s right-wing president joining left-wing presidents in Uruguay and Ecuador to advocate for an end to prohibitionist drug policies, while left-wing governments in Venezuela and Nicaragua strongly support the status quo.”

The speed of the decline in US dominance is indicated by a few quotations from the NACLA article. First is Colombia’s Minister

of Justice and Human Rights, speaking to the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs, who said that “Despite using all of these measures [for drug eradication], we have not, as is the case in the rest of the world, achieved the desired results.” Speaking to the same group, the Mexican representative asserted that “strategies to reduce demand and supply...should not cause more harmful effects than the damage...generated by the demand and supply of drugs.” NACLA notes that “Such statements would have been unthinkable even two or three years ago. But now, such concerns are routinely expressed by sitting presidents and officials from key Latin American countries.”

And so the so-called War on Drugs, declared when the US Empire was still near the height of its powers, winds down. How will the national and international anti-drug bureaucracy be dismantled? Or, will it? And what will take its place? Whatever happens, it looks like Latin America, not the United States, may lead the way into the future.

CT

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*Jeff Nygaard is editor of Nygaard Notes –
<http://nygaardnotes.org>– where this article
was first published*

The so-called War on Drugs, declared when the US Empire was still near the height of its powers, winds down



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(Left to right) Leslie James Pickering, Craig Rosebraugh and Elaine Close return to their Portland home after the FBI raid.

Radical time capsule

Michael I. Niman tells how the FBI returned computers and typewriters and files to activist bookstore owner after 14 years

Their outfit operated much like many large multinational corporate PR agencies. The difference was in the clients they represented

A long time ago I gifted a worn and rather worthless car to a friend. Though he intended to nurse my old hooptie back to life, he wound up abandoning it. Years later I stumbled upon the car, embalmed in bird droppings and wrapped in vines, tucked away in another friend's backyard. Finding it was like finding a time capsule, ripe with artifacts from my prior life, reemerging like a ghost after two decades.

My reunion with my old car offers, at best, a poor analogy for what Buffalo bookstore owner Leslie James Pickering must be experiencing right now. But luckily for me, it's the best one I can come up with. When I

try to empathize with Pickering, this is all I have to work with.

Pickering just received a shipment from his prior life, by way of the FBI. A decade and a half ago, Pickering lived in Portland, Oregon. He, along with his friend, Craig Rosebraugh, operated from their house what can best be described as a not-for-profit public relations agency. Their outfit operated much like many large multinational corporate PR agencies, offering press releases and data in support of their clients' positions and actions. The biggest difference, beyond scale and their lack of a profit motive, was in the clients they represented.

Whereas the corporate outfits regularly

represent ecocidal companies or warring governments whose actions sometimes result in thousands of human deaths, Pickering and Rosebraugh's primary client was the Earth Liberation Front (ELF).

The ELF was not an organization but an ideological movement, ostensibly inspired by the Deep Ecology movement personified by Earth First! in the 1980s and 1990s. Earth First!'s mischievous tactics of direct action included "monkey wrenching" the machinery of environmental destruction, through actions such as disabling bulldozers and degrading the economic value of old growth trees by hammering large spikes into them, making it too risky and not economically viable to cut them down. The ELF, however, took these tactics to another level, exponentially raising the ante of what they termed "direct action." People claiming the ELF banner, for example, torched a ski resort, McMansions, a condo development, and university laboratories where they believed GMO research was being conducted.

While Pickering and Rosebraugh claim to have never participated in planning or carrying out an ELF action, they were both publicly sympathetic to the movement. Their PR operation, which operated from 1997 to 2002, became known as the "ELF Press Office," maintaining a public address where they received anonymous communiqués from the arsonists and vandals behind many ELF-type actions. Pushing free speech to its legal limits, they processed this information for press dissemination, often appearing publicly to contextualize and answer questions about ELF actions, much like corporate PR people do for their clients.

During this period, as the ELF gained notoriety destroying property, the FBI declared them the nation's top "domestic terror" threat. They issued this designation despite fact that nobody was ever hurt in any ELF action and that more dangerous movements such as the anti-abortion and white supremacist movements were specifically targeting and killing people at that time –

albeit while posing much less of a threat to corporate and development interests.

Running the press office made both Rosebraugh and Pickering prime targets for the FBI to investigate. Yet, to date, FBI investigations initiated more than 15 years ago have failed to turn up any criminal connection between Pickering and Rosebraugh and the arsonists and vandals behind the ELF actions.

In January 2000, and again in April 2001, FBI agents raided Rosebraugh and Pickering's home, which also served as the press office. The second raid came shortly after the pair issued press releases in connection with an arson attack that burned 35 SUVs in a nearby dealership. Both times, the FBI agents seized computer equipment, journals, typewriters, photo albums, personal papers, and other assorted items. According to Pickering, the FBI provided no inventory for the 2000 seizure and only a partial inventory for the 2001 seizure. A few months later, a representative from the agency contacted Pickering and Rosebraugh, offering to return their seized property. When the pair turned up to retrieve their belongings, however, agents only offered to return a recycling bucket and its contents.

ELF actions were controversial among environmentalists who questioned the efficacy of their tactics, feared that somebody could get hurt or killed in one of their actions, and argued that these actions could be used by the government to justify further repression of non-violent direct action environmental and anti-corporate movements. While Pickering hasn't wavered in his support of ELF tactics, he left the press office and stopped doing PR for the ELF 14 years ago, roughly one year after the second raid on his home. In 2011, he was interviewed for the Academy Award nominated documentary "If a Tree Falls," which told the story of the ELF. He is still an activist today, often lecturing on environmental issues. His bookstore, Burning Books, often hosts activist speakers and films. Pickering has reinvented himself over

While Pickering and Rosebraugh claim to have never participated in planning or carrying out an ELF action, they were both publicly sympathetic to the movement

JUST A MEMORY

FBI investigations initiated more than 15 years ago have failed to turn up any criminal connection between Pickering and Rosebraugh and the arsonists and vandals behind the ELF actions



Some of the seized press office equipment

the past 14 years as a soft-spoken family man and a business owner – whose quiet voice still speaks of revolution.

And the FBI still keeps an eye on Pickering. In the summer of 2012, the Buffalo office of the FBI allegedly started asking questions about him. In April of this year, the Eugene office of the FBI contacted Rosebraugh, telling him they were ready to return what they seized from his and Pickering's Portland home 14 years ago. Or at least they were ready to return the portion of the seized property that they actually inventoried, which, according to Pickering, amounts to about one SUV of material, from a seizure that filled at least three government SUVs.

The email from the FBI listed an inventory of the property they were returning: Mac, Dell, "Mini-Tower" [sic.] and "Domino tower" [sic.] computers, a computer mouse, a monitor, a keyboard, a Canon printer, a Brother fax/scanner, a Umax scanner, a cell phone, and IBM, Royal, and "Underwood

Five" typewriters, which Pickering claims he was using as part of a book arts project. An FBI forensic examination of these artifacts provided what the agency terms "no useful info."

Michael Kuzma, who currently serves as Pickering's attorney, suspects the equipment was seized "by design to cripple the press office and crush the First Amendment rights of these activists," adding that, "The FBI is no fan of free speech." Kuzma suspects that his client's property was not actually being studied as evidence for the past 14 years but was "collecting dust." The seizure, he argues, "fits in with the purpose of the FBI – historically to monitor and disrupt political organizations they deem to be subversive." It's being returned now, Kuzma suspects, because "Leslie's public speaking activities, such as his recent European speaking tour, has embarrassed the FBI – an embarrassment because during his PowerPoint presentation he shows images of the

JUST A MEMORY

You could say these items have aged like fine wine, starting their incarceration as worn equipment but aging into historic artifacts



Federal agent carries equipment from the house during the raid.

agents actually seizing the equipment 14 years ago.”

Pickering argues that the FBI “seems to be this uncertain mix of extreme bureaucracy and extreme incompetency.” Hence, he explains, “I’m not really even asking myself why they would suddenly release this junk after 14 years,” adding that he’s not “tormenting” himself by “searching for any more unanswerable questions.” He does point out, however, that his property was ostensibly confiscated as part of the SUV arson investigation, yet that crime was solved almost a decade ago.

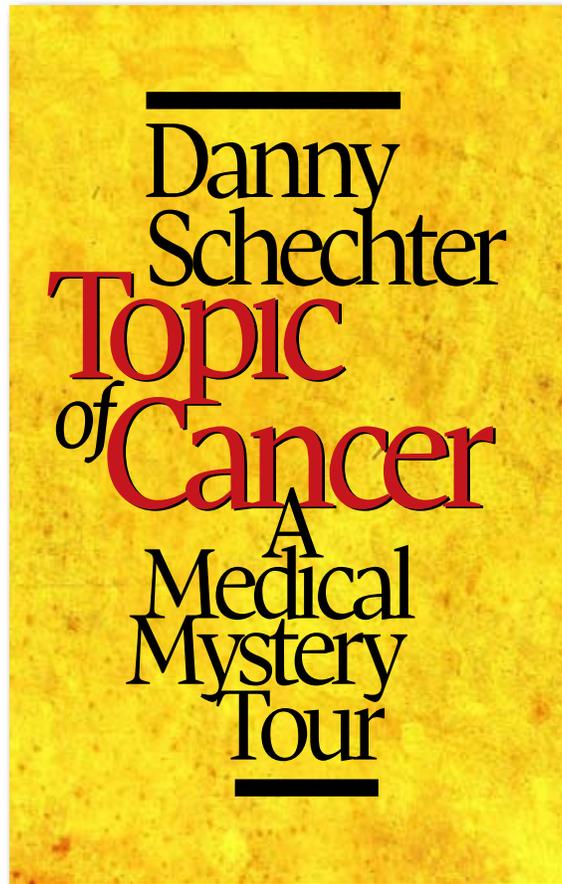
Unlike my car, which sat and rotted under birds and vegetation, we don’t quite know where these artifacts traveled over the past 14 years, who they touched, and what they had to say. What did forensic investigators think of the zeros and ones that populated the seized hard drives and painted pictures of the lives of Pickering, Rosebraugh, and their roommates? What did they learn from

the computer mouse? Whose DNA coated it? What sort of detritus was left on the printer? What resins clung to the monitor?

These 14 years have not been kind to Rosebraugh and Pickering’s property, rendering all but the typewriters, which were already obsolete, as antiques. On the other hand, you could say these items have instead aged like fine wine, starting their incarceration as worn equipment but aging into historic artifacts. Put together into a collection, as the FBI agents unwittingly curated them, we can see something more than obsolete junk. Together, this curated collection gives us a tactile reminder of a political time, place, and tactic, representing both the revolutionary fervor of the ELF and the reactionary abuses of the FBI. **CT**

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*Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and critical media studies at SUNY Buffalo State.
His website is <http://mediastudy.com>*

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Your problems are our problems

Americans can learn as much from the UK experience as the British can learn from what's happening in the United States, says **Sam Pizzigati**

We live in a trickle-down world, or so insist our world's richest and those who cheer them on. The grand fortunes our rich amass, their story goes, eventually trickle down and benefit us all. University of Oxford social geographer Danny Dorling agrees – up to a point.

We do live, as he relates in these pages, in a trickle-down world. But what's trickling down brings most of us no benefit.

The reason? Wealth isn't trickling down from above. Myths are. Myths that rationalize our young century's colossal concentration of riches and power. Myths – Dorling calls them the “ideologies of inequality” – that aim to justify injustice.

For Dorling, our world's staggeringly unequal distribution of income and wealth has become the “disease behind injustice,” a disease that binds the elitism, exclusion, prejudice, and despair that define our epoch.

Why do we let this inequality define us? We have simply, Dorling believes, imbibed too many myths from those who lord over us. A century ago, amid the struggle for social insurance to protect

workers injured on the job, men of wealth and power argued that workers insured against disability would cut off their own limbs to reap the rewards disability protection would provide.

“Injustice” exposes the myths that rationalize our income and wealth concentration.

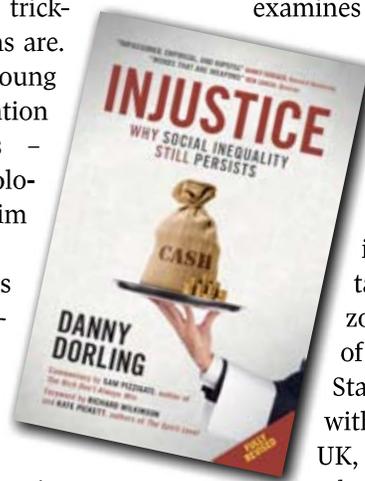
Today's rich and their hired hands seldom get that crude. They spin much more sophisticated myths. In “Injustice,” Dorling examines – and exposes – them all.

Sometimes with figures and charts. Sometimes with history. Sometimes with unrelenting logic.

A word of warning for American readers: Injustice invites you – expects you – to take a leap out of your comfort zone. The book includes plenty of material about the United States. But its pages also abound with stories and stats from the UK, that proverbial “other side of the pond.”

Dorling is, in effect, betting that Americans can learn as much from the UK experience as the British can learn from what's happening in the United States. A reasonable proposition from a readable book. **CT**

Wealth isn't trickling down from above. Myths are. Myths that rationalize our young century's colossal concentration of riches and power



**INJUSTICE:
Why Social
Inequality Still
Persists**

Danny Dorling
Policy Press
£9.98 (Amazon)

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Sam Pizzigati is the editor of *Too Much Online* – <http://toomuchonline.org> – a commentary on excess and inequality. He is the author of “The Rich Don't Always Win”

The 51-day genocide

David Swanson reads a powerful new book on Israel's 2014 war on Gaza

The stories in the US media focused on Israelis' fears. The deaths of Gazans were explained as intentional sacrifices by a people with a "culture of martyrdom" who sometimes choose to die because it makes good video footage

Max Blumenthal's latest book, "The 51 Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza," tells a powerful story powerfully well. I can think of a few other terms that accurately characterize the 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza in addition to "war," among them: occupation, murder-spree, and genocide. Each serves a different valuable purpose. Each is correct.

The images people bring to mind with the term "war," universally outdated, are grotesquely outdated in a case like this one. There is no pair of armies on a battlefield. There is no battlefield. There is no aim to conquer, dispossess, or rob. The people of Gaza are already pre-defeated, conquered, imprisoned, and under siege -- permanently overseen by military drones and remote-control machine-guns atop prison-camp walls. In dropping bombs on houses, the Israeli government is not trying to defeat another army on a battlefield, is not trying to gain possession of territory, is not trying to steal resources from a foreign power, and is not trying to hold off a foreign army's attempt to conquer Israel.

Yes, of course, Israel ultimately wants Gaza's land incorporated into Israel, but not



**THE 51-DAY
WAR: RUIN AND
RESISTANCE
IN GAZA**

Max Blumenthal
Nation Books
\$14.15 (Amazon)

with non-Jewish people living on it. (Eighty percent of Gaza's residents are refugees from Israel, families ethnically cleansed in 1947-1948.) Yes, of course, Israel wants the fossil fuels off the Gazan coast. But it already has them. No, the immediate goal of the Israeli war on Gaza last year, like the one two years before, and like the one four years before that, would perfectly fit a name like "The 51 Day Genocide." The purpose was to kill. The end was nothing other than the means.

In 2014, as in 2012 and 2008, Israel again attacked the people of Gaza, using weapons provided for free by the US government, which could be counted on, even standing completely alone, to defend Israel's crimes at the United Nations. Practicing what's been called the Dahiya Doctrine, Israel's policy was one of collective punishment.

The stories in the US media focused on Israelis' fears. The deaths of Gazans were explained as intentional sacrifices by a people with a "culture of martyrdom" who sometimes choose to die because it makes good video footage. After all, Israel was phoning people's houses and giving them 5-minute warnings before blowing them up. The fact

that it was also blowing up shelters and hospitals they might flee to was glossed over or explained as somehow involving military targets.

But the Israeli media and internet were full of open advocacy by top Israeli officials of genocide. On August 1, 2014, the Deputy Speaker of Israel's Parliament posted on his Facebook page a plan for the complete elimination of the Gazan people using concentration camps, to take one of dozens of examples.

And the whole thing was kicked off when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lied that three murder victims might be still alive, falsely blamed their kidnapping on Hamas, and began raiding houses and mass-arresting Gazans. Once Israel and the United States had rejected out-of-hand quite reasonable ceasefire demands from Hamas, the war/genocide was on for 51 days -- with great popular support in Israel. Some 2,200 Gazan people were killed, over 10,000 injured, and 100,000 made homeless by a very one-sided war.

Here's a taste of how Blumenthal describes what happened:

"The two Red Crescent volunteers told me they later found a man in Khuza'a with rigor mortis, holding both hands over his head in surrender, his body filled with bullets. Deeper in the town, they discovered an entire family so badly decomposed they had to be shoveled with a bulldozer into a mass grave. In a field on the other side of town, Awad and Alkusofi found a shell-shocked woman at least eighty years of age hiding in a chicken coop. She had taken shelter there for nine days during the siege, living off of nothing but chicken feed and rain water."

While every bombed school and hospital was explained with the assertion that Gazan fighters were hiding among "human shields," we meet Gazan people in Blumenthal's book who were literally held up as shields by Israeli soldiers who shot at Gazans from over their shoulders. People also had new nasty weapons tested on them, including Dense

Inert Metal Explosives (DIME).

The people of Israel generally went along with this war (with many admirable exceptions), and later reelected its architects. Protests against the war were banned, and various lies (including those about the three murder victims that kicked it all off) were exposed in a matter of days or weeks. No matter, the point was to kill people, and people were killed. And no matter in Washington, either, which kept the weapons flowing, quite illegally.

Gaza launched some 4,000 rockets into Israel, to little apparent effect -- rockets whose total combined payload roughly equaled that of just 12 of the missiles Israel was sending into Gaza from its F-16s courtesy of the Land of the Free.

The "international community" gathered in Cairo on October 12, and diplomats "discussed the destruction of Gaza as though it were the result of a natural disaster -- as though the missiles that reduced the strip's border areas to rubble were meteors that descended from outer space." There was no way to discuss damage to both sides in a manner that would make Israel's actions seem legitimate, even by the standards of the "international community," so they discussed the one-sided damage as if nobody were responsible.

Is this where the United States is headed culturally and with its own wars? One reason to hope not is that opposing Israel's wars is one of the few places where US youth are engaged in antiwar activism. Nonetheless, there is reason for concern. The US has followed the Israeli model of domestic policing, of drone use, of assassination, and of propaganda, and the Israeli lead in relation to Iraq, Syria, and Iran. As the US military moves more and more toward treating the world as Israel treats Gaza, the world's future comes more and more into doubt. And there's little to suggest that Americans will oppose actions by their own government simply because they've previously opposed those same actions by the government of Israel. **CT**

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