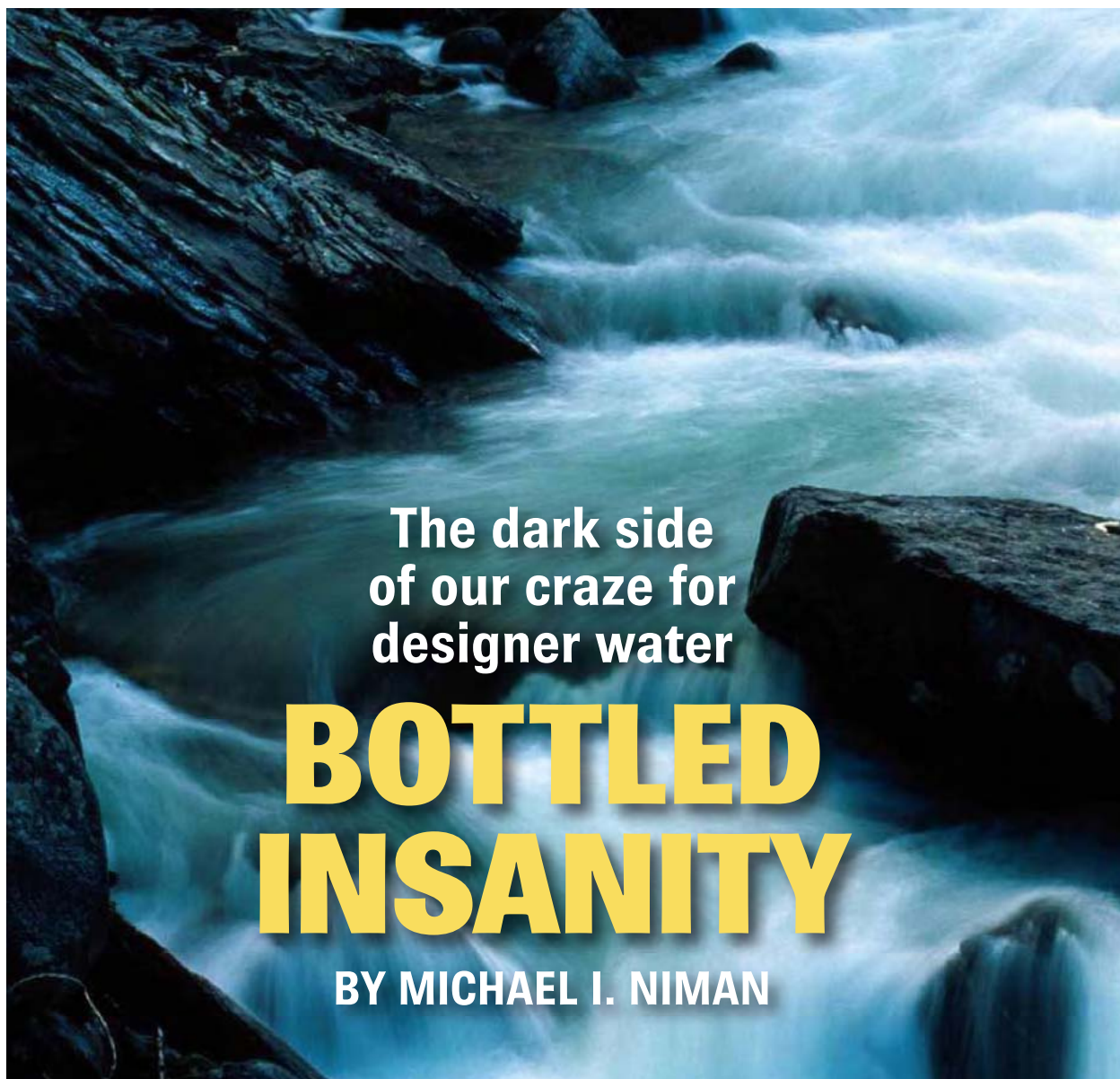

INSIDE: LOVE BOMBING FOR JESUS ● DEBTOR NATION ● LOOKING BACK IN ANGER ● EMPEROR OF AFRICA ● A TIMETABLE FOR MURDER ● & MORE

ColdType
The **READER**

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 14 ● MAY 2007



The dark side
of our craze for
designer water

**BOTTLED
INSANITY**

BY MICHAEL I. NIMAN

ColdType The READER



ISSUE 14 | MAY 2007

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LOVE BOMBING FOR JESUS

BY CHRIS HEDGES

There is a false, but effective, fiction that one has to be born again to be a Christian. The Christian right refuses to acknowledge the worth of anyone's religious experience unless, in the words of its tired and opaque cliché, one has accepted "Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior."

The emotional meltdown that leads to the conversion experience — one often induced in crowds skillfully manipulated and broken down by demagogues — is one of the most pernicious tools of the movement. Through conversion one surrenders to a higher authority. And the higher authority, rather than God, is the preacher who steps in to take over one's life. Being born again, and the process it entails, has far more in common with recruitment into a cult than it does with genuine belief.

I attended a five-day seminar in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where I was taught the techniques of conversion, often by D. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries. The callousness of these tech-

niques — targeting the vulnerable, building false friendships with the lonely or troubled, promising to relieve people of the most fundamental dreads of human existence, from the fear of mortality to the numbing pain of grief — gave to the process an awful cruelty and dishonesty.

The seminar, which I attended as part of the work I did on my book "American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America," gave me a window into the subtle and pernicious techniques this movement uses to manipulate and control its followers. Kennedy openly called converts "recruits" and spoke about them joining a new political force sweeping across the country to reshape and reform America into a Christian state.

"I would always go in first, introduce myself, Jim Kennedy," he told us. "I'm checking the lay of the land and I will look around the living room and see if there's something there that I can comment about. Frequently, there will be a large picture somewhere and where did they put it, this picture ... why would

Being born again, and the process it entails, has far more in common with recruitment into a cult than it does with genuine belief

BEING REBORN

Kennedy warns us not to carry a large Bible, but to keep a small one hidden in a pocket, saying "don't show your gun until you're ready to shoot it"

they put it over the fireplace? Significant."

"In Fort Lauderdale you don't find too many fireplaces," he added, smiling, "but there's some kind of central focus. Maybe ... golf trophies ... I'm over here looking at these golf trophies ... painting ... I say ... beautiful painting, did you paint that? The first rule about looking at trophies, don't touch them ... did you win all those trophies? So we have a little conversation about golf, but I know enough about golf to have this conversation ... now what have I done? I'm making a friend."

"Compliment them on whatever you can," Kennedy said, "discuss what they do, you're going to find out what are their hobbies, maybe right there in the living room. Then you're going to ask them about what they do, where they're from, how long they've been there ... something to discuss with them ... in doing this, you have made a friend."

He tells us to "emphasize the positive" and "identify with your prospect." We are encouraged in the green "Evangelism Explosion" instruction manual to use sentences such as "It is wonderful to know when I lay my head on my pillow tonight that if I do not awaken in bed in the morning, I will awaken in paradise with God" or paint graphic pictures of personal tragedy that God has helped solve, such as: "I had a Christian son killed in Vietnam, yet my heart is filled with peace because I know he has eternal life. Even though he was killed by an enemy mortar, he has a home now in heaven, and one day we'll be reunited there."

We are told to pepper our testimonies with words like love, peace, faithfulness, forgiveness, hope, purpose and obedience and remember to talk about how we have found, in our own conversion, "courage in the face of death."

Kennedy warns us not to carry a large Bible, but to keep a small one hidden in a pocket, saying "don't show your gun until you're ready to shoot it."

The conversion, at first blush, is simply euphoric. It is about new friends, loving and accepting friends, about the final conquering of human anxieties, fears and addictions, about attainment through God of wealth, power, success and happiness. For those who have known personal and economic despair it feels like a new life, a new beginning.

The new church friends call the converts, invite them to dinner and have time to listen to their troubles and answer their questions. Kennedy tells us that we must keep in touch in the days after conversion. He encourages us to keep detailed files on those we proselytize. We must be sure new converts are never left standing alone at church. We must care when no one else seems to care. The new converts are assigned a "discipler" or prayer partner, a new friend, who is wiser than they are in the ways of the Lord and able to instruct them in their new life.

Love bombing

Intense interest by a group of three or four evangelists in a potential convert, an essential part of the conversion process, the flattery and feigned affection, the rapt attention to those being

recruited and the flurry of “sincere” compliments are a form of “love bombing.”

It is the same technique employed by most cults, such as the Unification Church, or “Moonies,” to attract prospects. It was a well-developed tactic of the Russian and Chinese communist parties, which share many of the communal and repressive characteristics of the Christian right.

“Love bombing is a coordinated effort, usually under the direction of leadership, that involves long-term members flooding recruits and newer members with flattery, verbal seduction, affectionate but usually nonsexual touching, and lots of attention to their every remark,” the psychiatrist Margaret Thaler Singer wrote. “Love bombing – or the offer of instant companionship – is a deceptive ploy accounting for many successful recruitment drives.”

The new convert is gradually drawn into a host of church activities by his or her new friends, leaving little time for outside socializing. But the warmth and embrace soon bring new rules. When you violate the rules, you sin, you flirt with rebellion, with becoming a “backslider,” someone who was converted but has fallen and is once again on the wrong side of God.

And as the new converts are increasingly invested in the church community, as they cut ties with their old community, it is harder to dismiss the demands of the “discipler” and church leaders. The only proper relationship is submission to those above you, the abandonment of critical thought and

the mouthing of thought-terminating clichés that are morally charged. “Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior” or “the wages of sin are death” is used to end all discussion.

Rules are incorporated slowly and deliberately into the convert’s belief system. These include blind obedience to church leaders, the teaching of an exclusive, spiritual elitism that demonizes all other ways of being and believing, and a persecution complex that keeps followers mobilized and distrustful of outsiders.

Total submission

The rules create a system of total submission to church doctrine. They discourage independent thought and action. And the result is the destruction of old communities and old friendships. Believers are soon enclosed in the church community. They are taught to place an emphasis on personal experience rather than reasoning, and to reject the rational, reality-based world. For those who defy the system, who walk away, there is a collective banishment.

There is a gradual establishment of new standards for every aspect of life. Those who choose spouses must choose Christian spouses. Families and friends are divided into groups of “saved” and “unsaved.” The movement, while it purports to be about families, is in practice the great divider of families, friends and communities. It competes with the family for loyalty. It seeks to place itself above the family, either drawing all family members into its embrace or pushing aside those who

When you violate the rules, you sin, you flirt with rebellion, with becoming a “backslider,” someone who was converted but has fallen and is once again on the wrong side of God

BEING REBORN

They now know how to define and identify themselves. They do not have to make moral choice. It is made for them. They submerge their individual personas into the single persona of the Christian crowd

resist conversion.

There were frequent prayers during the seminar I attended for relatives who were “unsaved,” those who remained beyond the control of the movement. Many of these prayers, including one by a woman for her unsaved grandchildren, were deeply emotional. It was not unusual to see these saved Christians sobbing over the damnation of those they loved.

The new ideology gives the believers a cause, a sense of purpose, meaning, feelings of superiority and a way to justify and sanctify their hatreds. For many, the rewards of cleaning up their lives, of repairing their damaged self-esteem, of joining an elite and blessed group are worth the cost of submission. They now know how to define and identify themselves. They do not have to make moral choice. It is made for them. They submerge their individual personas into the single persona of the Christian crowd.

New world of magic

Their hope lies not in the real world, but in this new world of magic and miracles. For most, the conformity, the flight away from themselves, the dismissal of facts and logic, the destruction of personal autonomy, even with its latent totalitarianism, cause a welcome and joyous relief. The flight into the arms of the religious right, into blind acceptance of a holy cause, compensates for the convert’s despair and lack of faith in himself or herself.

And the more corrupted and soiled the converts feel – the more profound the despair – the more militant they

become, shouting, organizing and agitating to create a pure and sanctified Christian nation, a purity they believe will offset their own feelings of shame and guilt. Many want to be deceived and directed. It makes life easier to bear.

Freedom from fear, especially the fear of death, is what is being sold. It is a lie, as everyone who works to write and rewrite his or her testimony in the seminar – all corrected and handed back to us by our instructors – has to know on some level. But admitting this in front of other believers is impossible. Such an admission is interpreted as a lack of faith. And this too is part of the process, for it fosters internally a dread of being found out, a morbid guilt that one is not as good or as Christian as those all around.

The estrangement does not go away with conversion or blind obedience or submission. Belief systems that preach a utopian and unachievable ideal drive this angst underground, forcing the convert to measure himself or herself against an impossible end.

We were instructed in the seminar to inform potential converts that Jesus came to Earth and died “to pay the penalty for our sins and to purchase a place in heaven for us” and that “to receive eternal life you must transfer your trust from yourself to Jesus Christ alone for eternal life.”

We were told to ask the convert if he or she is willing “to turn from what you have been doing that is not pleasing to Him and follow Him as He reveals His will to you in His Word.” If the convert agrees to accept a new way of life we

are to bow our heads and pray, with the convert repeating each line after us.

“Lord Jesus, I want You to come in and take over my life right now. I am a sinner. I have been trusting in myself and my own good works. But now I place my trust in You. I accept You as my own personal Savior. I believe you died for me. I receive You as Lord and Master of my life. Help me to turn from my sins and to follow You. I accept the free gift of eternal life. I am not worthy of it, but I thank You for it. Amen.”

And when it is over, the new believers are told, “Welcome to the family of God.” They are told to read a chapter a day in the Gospel of John and that they will be visited again in a week to talk about the Bible. They are encouraged to pray, because God “promised to hear

and answer our prayers.” They are told to find “a good Bible-believing church and become a part of it.” They are told to join a Christian fellowship group. And they are told to witness to those in their family.

With this, the process of deconstructing an individual and building a submissive follower, one who no longer has any allegiance to the values of the open society and the democratic state, begins. **CT**

Chris Hedges, who graduated from seminary at Harvard Divinity School, is the author of “American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America.” He is a senior fellow at The Nation Institute and a Lannan Literary Fellow.

They are told to join a Christian fellowship group. And they are told to witness to those in their family



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DEBTOR NATION

BY DANNY SCHECHTER

When I started making a film on the subject, "In Debt We Trust," a colleague warned me that the issue might be too obscure to rate media coverage

Well over a year ago, I wrote an article for Harvard's journalism journal *Nieman Reports* complaining about deeply flawed media coverage of credit and debt issues in America.

"There is a credit divide in America that fuels our economic divide," I wrote, warning of a potential economic implosion because so many Americans are trapped by a debt squeeze. I was not alone in projecting a crisis, although my focus was more on the failure of many media outlets to track the problem and ask deeper questions.

"Ours has become a nation in which the carrot of instant affluence is quickly menaced by the harsh stick of bill collectors, lawsuits, and foreclosures," I argued.

"And yet, this bubble can burst and has: The slickest of our bankers and the savviest of our marketers have been able to undo the law of gravity, that what goes up must come down."

One didn't have to be an expert to see the warning signs which have since

led to a massive market meltdown, a collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market, bankruptcies by leading financial lenders, billions of dollars in losses by top banks and financial lenders, and predictions of more pain to come for nearly two million Americans facing foreclosures.

When I started making a film on the subject, "In Debt We Trust," colleagues warned me that the issue might be too obscure to rate media coverage. "No one likes to talk about money," said a producer friend. "This could be such a downer."

Now what are they saying?

It doesn't feel good to be right when so many people are being wronged. At the time I called on media outlets to take some steps to beef up their reporting. Most didn't, but it's never too late.

Here's what I proposed then, and repeat now:

- Report more regularly on these credit issues; billions of dollars are involved, not to mention millions of lives.
- Identify the key corporate institu-

tions and contrast the compensation of their executives with the financial circumstances of their customers. Look into the process of “financialization” that is transferring more wealth from the people with the least at the bottom to the people with the most at the top of society.

- Shine a spotlight on how special interests and lobbyists for financial institutions contribute to members of Congress and other politicians, across party lines, to ensure their desired policies and curb effective regulations.

- Expose political influence driven by campaign contributions. Some reporting about this took place during the bankruptcy debate, but there has been little follow-up.

- Examine the influence credit card companies have on media coverage through their extensive and expensive advertising.

- Take a hard look at the predatory real estate practices in poor neighborhoods – and crimes committed against poor people, who are least able to defend themselves. Legal service lawyers tell me that they are overwhelmed by the scale of mortgage scams involving homes whose value have been artificially inflated.

- Focus attention on what consumers can do to fight back. Robert Manning, author of “Credit Card Nation,” explains: “If ten percent of American credit cardholders withheld their monthly payments, it would bring the financial services industry to a standstill. At a larger issue, what we have to do is to get

people involved at the state level, get their state attorney generals involved, aggressively filing class action lawsuits and then putting pressure on key legislators to say, ‘This is unacceptable that they’re not representing and balancing the issues of commerce with consumers. The balance is tilted dramatically against the average American.’”

- Report on initiatives like Americans For Debt Relief Now that are setting up community, church and grass roots house party screenings of the film “In Debt We Trust.”

We need to educate the public about the deeper forces at work and the need for structural changes, urgent reforms and regulations and new consumer protections. We need to stop restating problems and start exploring solutions including debt relief.

The globalization of our economy is about more than the outsourcing of jobs. There is a deeper shift under way from a society based around production, with the factory as the symbol of American economic prowess, to a culture driven by consumption, with the mall as its new dominant icon.

New form of class struggle

Class struggle today is assuming a new form in the conflict between creditors and lenders that reaches into many Americans’ homes, where each month bills are juggled and rejuggled with today’s credit card bills paid by tomorrow’s new card. Meanwhile, with interest compounding at usurious rates, indebtedness grows and people sink even

There is a deeper shift under way from a society based around production, with the factory as the symbol of American economic prowess, to a culture driven by consumption, with the mall as its new dominant icon

Centuries ago, we had debtors prisons. Today, many of our homes are similar kinds of prisons, where debtors struggle for survival with personal finance pressures

deeper into debts they cannot manage. No wonder we are becoming a nation of scammers with consumers using every trick they can think of against banks that then hide their own predatory practices in legalese.

In this conflict, financial institutions function as well-organized collection machines while individual borrowers are forced to react as individuals. Many are browbeaten with lectures about “personal responsibility” by corporations that only pay lip service to any form of social responsibility while compensating their own executives obscenely high salaries.

Centuries ago, we had debtors prisons. Today, many of our homes are similar kinds of prisons, where debtors struggle for survival with personal finance pressures. Who is really responsible for this? Few of us seem to know.

And fewer appear to know what can be done about it. “They’re never going to be repaid,” says economic historian Michael Hudson who for many years

worked at Chase Bank. “Adam Smith said that no government had ever repaid its debts and the same can be said of the private sector. The U.S. government does not intend to repay its trillion dollar debt to foreign central banks and, even if it did intend to, there’s no way in which it could. Most of the corporations now are avoiding paying their pension fund debts and their health care debts.”

Yes, these can be complicated issues that lead to tune-out, what TV producers call the ‘Mego Effect’ – “my eyes glaze over.” Yet because so many people are involved, it is urgent that our media push these issues from the business pages to the front pages and humanize them so we can try to wrestle our lives back from the ravages of a relentless debt machine. **CT**

“News Dissector” Danny Schechter edits MediaChannel.org, where this article first appeared. His film “In Debt We Trust,” is now in release.



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Get all the details at: <http://www.indebtwetrust.org/media.php>

TONY BLAIR: EMPEROR OF AFRICA

BY GEORGE MONBIOT

The disease that afflicts all British governments is an inability to let go. Unable to accept the end of empire, they cling to past glories. However much they speak of modernity and democracy, they cannot help managing other people's lives, preserving foreigners – often at gunpoint – from the mistakes they would make if they were allowed to govern themselves.

I was going to call this an imperial delusion, but the United Kingdom has been remarkably successful at defending its powers. Our government has retained a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Its membership of the G8 is unchallenged. Most importantly, it has preserved its unwarranted share of the vote on the boards of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. And it has no intention of giving this up.

In advance of the IMF's spring meeting (which has just concluded in Washington) France and the United Kingdom rejected any political reform. It is true that the fund's proposals are

feeble. It is true that even after far more ambitious reforms the IMF would remain the wrong body, constitutionally destined to fail. But this is not why our government is holding out. It is resisting change because it wants to preserve its imperial rank.

The United Kingdom, with 1% of the world's population, has 5% of the IMF's votes. Sub-Saharan Africa, with 12% of the population, has 4.6%. The UK's share equals that of China and India put together. It is five times as big as Argentina's, 19 times Bangladesh's, 35 times Kenya's, 124 times bigger than Malawi's. The G7 nations – the UK, US, Japan, Germany, France, Canada and Italy – together possess 45% of the vote. The other 177 members are left to squabble over the remains.

Even these numbers tell only half the story. The five countries with the biggest quotas – the US, UK, Japan, Germany and France – are each allowed to appoint their own executive director to the IMF's board. The rest must submit their candidates for election. Because poor nations don't know

However much they speak of modernity and democracy, they cannot help managing other people's lives, preserving foreigners – often at gunpoint – from the mistakes they would make if they were allowed to govern themselves

LEGACY OF MISERY

The governments which are never made subject to the IMF's strictures control it, while those whose countries have been reduced to an IMF franchise have no say in the way it runs

what's good for them, they are assigned to the tutelage of richer ones. The votes of the English-speaking Caribbean countries are given to Canada. Mongolia is represented by Australia, Kazakhstan by Belgium. The reason the UK and France are resisting even the most timid reforms is that these would tip them below the threshold for automatic election: like the other countries they would be represented on the board as part of a bloc.

Power is distributed like this because the IMF is a plutocracy. A country's vote represents its "quota", which is a function of its gross domestic product. In theory the quota reflects countries' financial contributions to the fund. This is no longer the case, as the IMF receives much of its income from loan repayments from poorer nations. But the old formula has resisted 60 years of complaints.

The result is that the governments which are never made subject to the IMF's strictures control it, while those whose countries have been reduced to an IMF franchise have no say in the way it runs. The fund's allocation of votes is a perfect inversion of democracy.

Broken promises

A new report by ActionAid gives us a glimpse of how this unfair distribution of power affects the poor. After years of protests by poor countries and their supporters in the rich world, the IMF and the World Bank at last permitted them to provide healthcare and education without charge. The rich nations also promised, in 2000, to ensure that

by 2015 every child on earth would have primary education. It looked like a great victory for the global justice movement. But the IMF is ensuring that the promise won't be met. It has, in effect, forbidden the poorest nations to hire sufficient teachers.

No one disputes that public sector wage rises can contribute to inflation. No one denies that governments have to exercise some degree of restraint.

But the paternalists who run the IMF – who are fixated on creating safe havens for foreign capital – cannot help micromanaging the economies of the poor nations, without reference to the needs of the people who live there. The limits they have imposed on the public sector pay bill ensure that schooling can't be improved.

ActionAid studied three very poor countries with major education problems: Malawi, Mozambique and Sierra Leone. After they abolished user fees (and when the civil war ended in Sierra Leone), vast numbers of pupils enrolled.

But a combination of the rich nations' failure to provide the foreign aid they had promised and the restrictions imposed by the IMF has prevented these countries from meeting the new demand.

As a result, the pupil to teacher ratio in Sierra Leone is 57:1; in Malawi 72:1 and in Mozambique 74:1. That's the average: in rural areas it can be much higher. Many of the teachers are untrained; many give up because they cannot survive on their wages. In Malawi, for example, the goods required for the most basic level of sub-

sistence cost \$107 a month. A trained teacher receives \$55.

So crowds of pupils strain to hear a scarcely-literate teacher somewhere in the middle distance seeking to instruct them without books, chalk, paper or pens. We should not be surprised to discover that 40% of children fail to complete primary school in Sierra Leone and Mozambique, and 70% in Malawi. Most of the drop-outs are girls.

As a result, these countries are stuck in a vicious circle of misery. Until education improves, GDP remains low. Until GDP rises, there's little money for education.

As one of the agencies charged with rescuing countries from poverty, the IMF should be seeking to break this circle. But the conditions it attaches to its loans keep these countries in their place.

In Malawi the IMF sets the ceiling for public sector wages directly; in Sierra Leone and Mozambique the broader macroeconomic rules it imposes have the same effect. ActionAid argues that its fiscal targets are outdated and unnecessary: all these countries have now achieved sufficient stability to start raising teachers' pay.

But in no case did the IMF consult either the public or the state's own ministry of education before laying down the law.

The amount of money a teacher in rural Malawi is paid is decided by the men in Horse Guards Road and Pennsylvania Avenue. Except for the district commissioners in pith helmets, little has changed since the country was called Nyasaland.

Last year Tony Blair acknowledged that the IMF "must become more representative of emerging economic powers and give greater voice to developing countries." But he just can't let go. The proposed reforms do nothing to democratise the IMF; by linking the quota to purchasing power parity rather than raw GDP, they simply turn it into a more sophisticated plutocracy.

But they would have the effect of very slightly empowering some middle-income countries while taking a few votes away from some of the rich ones. Even that is too much for the Emperor of Africa.

If the British government wants to help the poor, it must first give up its power to tell them how to live. Until that happens, everything the prime minister says about "partnership" and "solidarity" with the world's oppressed is humbug. **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book is Heat (Doubleday Canada). This article originally appeared in London's Guardian newspaper.

The amount of money a teacher in rural Malawi is paid is decided by the men in Horse Guards Road and Pennsylvania Avenue. Except for the district commissioners in pith helmets, little has changed since the country was called Nyasaland

**Read a 20-page excerpt from George Monbiot's book,
THE AGE OF DISSENT: A MANIFESTO FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER
at: www.coldtype.net/archives.html**

BOTTLED INSANITY

BY MICHAEL I. NIMAN

Here we are sitting on the edge of the Great Lakes – home to one fifth of the fresh water on the planet. Yet we buy water that is transported to northeastern North America from a small South Pacific atoll whose population suffers from chronic water shortages

It's got to be one of life's cheapest escapes: a mini buck fifty sojourn to the rainforests of Fiji, all from the convenience of your own cubicle. America is mad for Fiji water – an emerging victor in the designer water wars.

According to the Los Angeles-based Fiji Water Company, their bottled-in-Fiji artesian water is “untouched by man” (which I would hope is pretty standard for drinking water) and, due to a high-tech bottling plant, has never come in contact with 21st-century air. The hype positions it as the fossil fuel of waters – one more heirloom fluid to be ravenously plundered.

On one level it's refreshing to see people excited about water. For the most part, each bottle of water Americans drink represents one less sugar- and chemical-laden bottle of soda pop consumed. With sugary soft drinks (liquid candy averaging 11 teaspoons of sugar per 12-ounce bottle) emerging as a major culprit in our obesity epidemic, our newfound taste for water is certainly good news.

But there's a dark side to our new water craze. And in many ways, Fiji Water optimizes the self-destructive insanity of consumer culture. The problem is not Fiji Water per se. The company has built hospitals and water systems in Fiji, and I'm sure their water is great. The problem is bottled water in general, and Fiji Water makes a great case study.

I'm in Western New York State watching people drink Fiji Water out of little, indestructible plastic tanks adorned with colorful images of tropical flowers and waterfalls. But there's something very wrong here. Something very unnatural about this natural treat. Something that threatens the very existence of the tropical paradise depicted on the bottle. Something that lays bare the insanity of consumerism.

Here we are sitting on the edge of the Great Lakes – home to one fifth of the fresh water on the planet. We're hours away from pristine Adirondack mountain aquifers. Yet we buy water that is transported to northeastern North America from a small South Pa-

cific atoll whose population suffers from chronic water shortages. This water is packaged in plastic bottles made from dwindling oil reserves. Currently it takes about 63 million gallons of oil per year to manufacture disposable water bottles for US consumption.

Fiji Water bottles are made on-site in Fiji from polyethylene terephthalate (PET). The manufacturing process is energy-intensive and produces toxic byproducts. The plant that makes the bottles is one part of Fiji you'll never see pictured on a Fiji Water bottle. When we're done drinking our water, over 85 percent of these bottles wind up in landfills (where they take up to 1,000 years to degrade) and incinerators – the latter of which can release a potpourri of deadly toxics into the environment. Recycling plastic bottles is still often cost-prohibitive.

Bringing these bottles of water here from the other side of the earth involves packing them into cardboard boxes. In the South Pacific this often means rainforest cardboard. The boxes of bottles are then trucked from the bottling plant to a sea cargo terminal in Fiji, then shipped across the ocean on fossil-fuel-powered freighters to the US Pacific coast.

There they're loaded onto trains and trucks, all powered by fossil fuels, and eventually warehoused, prodded with forklifts, loaded onto other trucks, shipped to other warehouses and eventually delivered to your local convenience store or drink machine. Environmental impact-wise, you might as well be swigging down a pint of oil.

We're being sold a fantasy. A mo-

ment in Fiji. A taste of Fiji. And I'm sure someone out there will tell me there's no other water like it, or Perrier, or Poland Springs, on the planet.

But the insane reality is we're shipping water across an ocean and continent, to a region that already has the world's most abundant reserves of some of the best water on the planet – water that is also shipped around the world to other water snobs who will argue it's all worthwhile since there's no other water quite like New York's Adirondack spring water.

This behavior is killing the planet. And the places our designer water comes from, such as Fiji and the mountains of New York and Maine, are among the most vulnerable environments susceptible to the ravages of global warming.

Years ago I clipped a small newspaper story and stuck it to the wall of my office. It was a three-column-inch report of a northbound train hauling municipal waste crashing into a southbound train hauling, yes, municipal waste. The story was just a simple narrative. One train was on the wrong tack. A mistake was made. Never addressed was the obvious question: Why are we moving identical trains of garbage in opposite directions for a zero sum gain?

I guess this is the magic of the free market: Trains full of garbage or water passing in the night. The problem is that this madness is no longer sustainable. It never was. **CT**

Dr. Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism at Buffalo State College

I guess this is the magic of the free market: Trains full of garbage or water passing in the night

LOOKING BACK IN ANGER

BY SHEILA SAMPLES

Like a couple of deranged Benny Hills with "Yakety Sax" blaring in the background, they trashed treaties, insulted other world leaders, and undermined Constitutional restraints on everything that stood between them and their goal of worldwide corporate pillage and total executive power

"...the high office of the President has been used to ferment a plot to destroy the American's freedom, and before I leave office, I must inform the citizens of this plight." John F. Kennedy (November 12, 1963, Columbia U, 10 days before his assassination)

I cannot recall a single day since Vulcans' Godfather James Baker sent his thuggish henchman John Bolton to Florida's Palm Beach County to screw up the vote count that has not been filled with horror, anger, shame – despair. On Dec. 9, 2000 – three days before the Florida deadline – the US Republic shuddered on its axis when Bolton crashed through the doors of a Tallahassee library where Miami-Dade ballots were being recounted and shouted triumphantly – "I'm with the Bush-Cheney team, and I'm here to stop the count!"

In that instant we lost most of what had taken more than two centuries to build. In one fell swoop, Americans were thrust into the mire of an Orwellian World spinning out of control

on the other side of the Looking Glass. What a tragedy – not that so many failed to realize their government had just been seized in a coup de'etat – but that the few who did refused to acknowledge it.

The sudden unconstitutional decision by five unelected right-wing activist Supreme Court justices to blatantly steal an election for one of their own – to stop the vote count so Bush would not be "embarrassed" by losing – was a frightening assault upon the separation of powers, the American people, and upon democracy itself.

Having upset the national equilibrium, George Bush and Dick Cheney hit the deck at a dead run, trashing everything in their path. Like a couple of deranged Benny Hills with "Yakety Sax" blaring in the background, they trashed treaties, insulted other world leaders, and undermined Constitutional restraints on everything that stood between them and their goal of worldwide corporate pillage and total executive power.

Those who dare to look back will be

struck by the speed at which they resurrected the zombies of the Iran-Contra era, the tyrannical neo-Straussians, and the godless right-wing evangelical warmongers, Talk about an Axis! The stage was set for their long-planned crusade to gain control of not only the world and its resources but of space and cyberspace as well. The only thing lacking was an incident to catapult them into the war for which they lusted – an incident of such magnitude that cries of dissent would be lost in the roar for war.

Their vision of global dominance supplied them with moral justification for the filthy lies that took us into two wars and is threatening a third. “It is ironic,” writes Canadian author and professor Shadia Drury, “that American neoconservatives have decided to conquer the world in the name of liberty and democracy, when they have so little regard for either.” Drury has written two books on the philosophy of Leo Strauss, and she writes that Strauss believed “religion and war – perpetual war – would lift the masses from the animality of bourgeois consumption and the pre-occupation with ‘creature comforts’. Instead of personal happiness, they would live their lives in perpetual sacrifice to God and the nation.”

Nasty, deceptive and repressive

Neoconservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz, Irving and Bill Kristol, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, John Negroponte, and many others, took from Strauss a doctrine of “all politics all the time” – nasty, deceptive and repressive – whatever it takes for the

elite to exercise control over the vulgar unwashed. That would be you and me, fellow Americans, and Strauss said we could be inspired to rise above our “brutish existence only by fear of impending death or catastrophe.” The lies they told, and continue to tell, according to Drury, are “noble lies for the consumption of the masses.”

We are in the clutches of an evil, evil group of psychopaths – warmongering moral cowards whose faux leader, George W. Bush, is a shallow, self-destructive little bully who deserted his military post during a time of war.

Perhaps the most frightening of all is Michael Ledeen. Looking back, some might remember that Ledeen was Secretary of State Alexander Haig’s advisor, a member of the National Security Council and a consultant for Ronald Reagan’s Department of Defense. He played a central role in the Iran-Contra scandal. It was Ledeen who made the initial contact with Iranian arms dealers, which launched the arms-for-hostages affair and could have – should have – brought down the Reagan presidency.

Anyone reading Ledeen’s book, “Machiavelli on Modern Leadership”, will recognize the Bush doctrine and know that the horror of 9-11 was a foregone conclusion – a “done deal” – the minute they seized the 2000 election. Ledeen wrote, “To be an effective leader, the most prudent method is to ensure that your people are afraid of you. To instill that fear, you must demonstrate that those who attack you will not survive.”

On the evening of 9-11, Bush went

We are in the clutches of an evil, evil group of psychopaths – warmongering moral cowards whose faux leader, George W. Bush, is a shallow, self-destructive little bully who deserted his military post during a time of war

GLOBAL DISGRACE

For Americans, it is more than a momentary inconvenience that 3,302 of their sons and daughters have needlessly been killed, and that more than 26,000 have been wounded, broken, maimed – their lives and those of their loved ones utterly destroyed

before a paralyzed nation and, after a brief comment about praying, grieving and mourning for the 3,000 victims of that terrible day, he announced, “Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil.”

Then, warming to his subject, Bush rammed home what would become his mantra for the next six years – “These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.” He then assured the masses that he would make no distinction between the “terrorists” and the regimes that harbored them. Bush’s vision for revenge was to chase them all over the world and kill them all...

Destroying a nation

But a vision is not a plan. Looking back, it appears that Bush’s plan for perpetual war is sending Americans to their deaths, unequipped and untrained, while bellowing, “Support the Troops!” Bush’s plan is destroying an entire nation, its culture, its infrastructure – raping, torturing and slaughtering its people for no reason other than he can. It is creating a humanitarian crisis of mind-boggling proportions – more than 3.9 million Iraqis have fled their homes to safer areas in Iraq and in neighboring countries

For Americans, it is more than a momentary inconvenience that 3,302 of

their sons and daughters have needlessly been killed, and that more than 26,000 have been wounded, broken, maimed – their lives and those of their loved ones utterly destroyed. Stretching our military with its proud and honorable tradition of protecting this country until it breaks and then outsourcing legions of mercenaries to do our dirty work of preemptive attacks and occupation of other countries is not a plan that Americans will support.

Bush reminds us on a daily basis that our world changed on “September the 11th.” That is true. But we must dare to look back even further to that dark December day when five Supreme Court judges made the ghastly decision that spawned the horrors of not only 9-11, but of the carnage in which we are embroiled today.

Before that bleak day, I had never used the f-word nor uttered the Lord’s name in vain. However, as this nation teeters on the cusp of spiritual, physical and political death, I can only pray that God will damn them. Every last fucking one of them. Please God. Damn them all. **CT**

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NEWS: ANOTHER CASUALTY OF WAR

BY DAHR JAMAIL

Iraq is the most dangerous place in the world for journalists. Along with names and dates, the Brussels Tribunal has listed the circumstances under which Iraqi media personnel have been killed since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. This extremely credible report cites 195 as dead. If non-Iraqi media representatives are included, the figure goes beyond 200. Both figures are well in excess of the media fatalities suffered in Vietnam or during World War II.

The primary reason why reporting from Iraq is dangerous for all journalists is the horrific security situation. Iraqi journalists reporting from the streets are in perpetual danger. If any of the countless militias does not want a certain story made public, it will make sure that the journalist has filed his or her last story. Not to mention the scores of reporter deaths which have been the combined handiwork of the Iraqi government, occupation forces and/or criminal gangs.

Despite President Bush's assertion that life in Iraq is improving, a senior

Iraqi journalist was found dead in the capital on March 3, 2007. On the same day the body of the managing editor of Baghdad's al-Safir newspaper, Jamal al-Zubaidi, was found shot in the head.

The realities of repression

The United States continues to claim that its military operations in Iraq bring freedom and democracy. But such freedom apparently doesn't extend to Iraqi journalists. Several journalists critical of the United States or the U.S.-backed Iraqi government have been killed. For instance, on March 4, 2007 gunmen killed prominent journalist Mohan al Zaher in his home. That Sunday, his column concluded with the lament, "...if this is the democracy that we (Iraqis) dreamt of." His earlier articles questioned U.S. policies in Iraq.

The U.S. military has also conducted direct raids on media establishments and representatives. During the invasion, on April 8, 2003, a U.S. warplane bombed the al-Jazeera bureau in Baghdad, killing 35-year-old journalist Tareq Ayoub. Britain's Daily Mirror later cited

If any of the countless militias does not want a certain story made public, it will make sure that the journalist has filed his or her last story

DANGER AT WORK

"The Americans have delivered so many messages to us, but we simply ignored all of them. They killed our colleagues, shut down our newspapers, arrested hundreds of us and now they are shooting at our hearts by raiding our headquarters. This is the freedom of speech we received"

the "top secret" minutes of a meeting during November 2004 where George W. Bush attempted to get British Prime Minister Tony Blair to consent to the bombing of the al-Jazeera headquarters in Doha, Qatar.

More recently, on February 23, 2007, U.S. soldiers raided and ransacked the offices of the Iraq Syndicate of Journalists (ISJ) in central Baghdad. The soldiers arrested ten armed guards and seized ten computers and 15 small electricity generators meant to be donated to families of killed journalists.

Youssif al-Tamimi of the ISJ in Baghdad told one of my close colleagues, "The Americans have delivered so many messages to us, but we simply ignored all of them. They killed our colleagues, shut down our newspapers, arrested hundreds of us and now they are shooting at our hearts by raiding our headquarters. This is the freedom of speech we received." Many Iraqis believe that the U.S. soldiers were conveying from their leadership to Iraqi journalists the message of zero tolerance for criticism of the U.S.-led occupation.

The U.S.-backed Iraqi government also directly controls the media. The Coalition Provisional Authority under the U.S. administrator, L. Paul Bremer, created the Media and Communications Commission as an instrument of control. This commission, incorporated into the Iraqi constitution, regulates licensing, telecommunications, broadcasting, information services, and all other media establishments. Under the authority of this commission, in July 2004, security forces of the interim Iraqi

government raided and shut down the Baghdad office of the Arabic satellite channel al-Jazeera. Initially the network faced a month-long ban on reporting out of Iraq. In November 2004 the Iraqi government announced that any al-Jazeera journalist found reporting in Iraq would be detained. Subsequently the ban was extended indefinitely and continues today.

Another instance of blatant media repression by the Iraqi state took place on November 11, 2004. During the siege of Fallujah when Iraqi journalists along with this writer were reporting the killing of civilians and the use of prohibited weapons such as white phosphorous by the U.S. military, Iraq's Media High Commission issued a warning on the official letterhead of the prime minister. The letter instructed reporters to, "Stick to the government line on the U.S. led offensive in Fallujah or face legal action" and also to "set aside space in your news coverage to make the position of the Iraqi government, which expresses the aspirations of most Iraqis, clear."

The international NGO Reporters Without Borders, which advocates freedom of the press, releases an annual worldwide press freedom index. Countries are ranked on the basis of surveys designed to record any kind of harassment of journalists and state violence against them that forces them to flee or abandon their work. In 2002, under Saddam Hussein and his draconian control of the media, Iraq ranked a dismal 130. In 2006, after three years of U.S. occupation, Iraq fell to 154. The NGO has also declared Iraq to be

among the world's worst hostage market, with 38 journalist kidnappings in three years.

Direct Manipulation

Currently there are two main channels for information on Iraq: the Pentagon and the Iraqi stringers who work for Arab media outlets. For audiences unfamiliar with Arabic or alternative news sources on Iraq, the only available news comes from daily press releases by the U.S. military that are parroted by the establishment media.

Another dubious source of information is the U.S.-sponsored Iraqi television station al-Iraqiyah that began broadcasting in May 2003. In January 2004, the U.S. Defense Department awarded the Florida-based Harris Corporation a 12-month contract to manage the Iraqi Media Network, including al-Iraqiyah, and provided the physical infrastructure for the expansion of the network.

The U.S. military also hired the Washington-based public relations firm Lincoln Group to manipulate Iraqi public opinion in favor of the United States. The group's covert program, worth millions of dollars, included various media activities that faked independent journalism in order to conceal the fact that it was U.S. state and military propaganda. Former Lincoln Group employees claim that U.S. military officials were aware of payments to Iraqi newspapers to print pro-U.S. articles and editorials.

Such state control has a boomerang effect. False news generated for the Iraqi public in local papers also comes

to the United States as "news." This indirect state-meddling abroad, coupled with direct repression of the media at home, is also reflected in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. In 2002, the United States ranked 17th. In 2006, after six years of Bush administration, the rank has fallen to 56th.

Covering the War at Home

Unlike in Iraq, the problem in the United States began before the 2003 invasion. In the prestigious New York Times, Judith Miller dutifully parroted the propaganda issued by the Bush administration about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction during the lead-up to the invasion. Quoting one anonymous source after another, she became a highly effective vehicle of the Bush administration in disseminating misinformation and lies about Saddam Hussein's possession of and attempt to acquire WMDs.

Later, during an interview with PBS Frontline conducted on July 13, 2006, in the presence of her lawyer, Miller brazenly defied criticism of her WMD coverage saying, "I didn't feel that I had anything to apologize for with my WMD coverage."

Once the invasion was launched, anchorman Tom Brokaw of NBC Nightly News announced to viewers nationwide, "One of the things that we don't want to do...is to destroy the infrastructure of Iraq because in a few days we're going to own that country."

The Pentagon's "embedded" program where mainstream media journalists volunteer to act as propagandists requires a journalist to sign a

The group's covert program, worth millions of dollars, included various media activities that faked independent journalism in order to conceal the fact that it was U.S. state and military propaganda

DANGER AT WORK

Corporate ownership of the media has much to do with the transformation of nationally televised news personalities into cheerleaders for war

contract giving the military control over her or his output which amounts to total censorship. Embedding continues to this day, as does corporate ownership of the media. Together they ensure coverage of the occupation that is biased in favor of the state as the media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) has exposed.

Corporate ownership of the media has much to do with the transformation of nationally televised news personalities into cheerleaders for war. Take the example of the Associated Press. Its board of directors includes the CEOs and presidents of ABC, McClatchy, Hearst, Tribune, and the Washington Post. Two of the directors belong to extremely conservative policy councils like the Hoover Institute, a Republican policy research center located on the campus of Stanford University and referred to as “Bush’s brain trust.” Douglas McCorkindale, another member of the AP board, is on the board of Lockheed Martin, the world’s largest defense contract company. The board of AP displays a clear tilt toward right-wing conservative views, represented by a huge corporate media network of the largest publishers in the U.S.

Today in the United States, our media is more homogenized than ever. Only six corporations control the major

U.S. media: Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, General Electric, Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, and Bertelsmann. These corporations also happen to be heavy financial supporters of the elite political groups (Republicans and Democrats alike) that control this country. They put politics ahead of responsible journalism.

“As news outlets fall into the hands of large conglomerates with holdings in many industries, conflicts of interest inevitably interfere with news gathering,” according to FAIR. “Independent media are essential to a democratic society, and...aggressive antitrust action must be taken to break up monopolistic media conglomerates.”

Until that happens in the United States, media coverage of Iraq is likely to worsen. As for Iraqi journalists, promises of free speech and freedom of the press— just like the earlier promises of liberation, economic opportunity, and freedom for the Iraqi people — will not materialize before the end of the U.S. occupation of the country. **CT**

Dahr Jamail has reported from inside Iraq and is a Middle East expert. He writes for Inter Press Service, where tyhis essay first appeared, The Asia Times, and is a contributor to Foreign Policy In Focus. His web site is dahrjamailiraq.com

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A TIMETABLE FOR MURDER

BY JON RONSON

Mid-April is the time of the year for school shootings in the US. This week in 2006 there were four foiled plots – at Riverton High School, Kansas; North Pole Middle School, Alaska; Pearl Junior High School, Mississippi, and one in Puyallup, Washington. The Columbine High School shootings took place on April 20 1999.

Last October, I travelled to North Pole, Alaska, the site of one of the failed school shootings, to make a documentary about it for More 4. The documentary – *Travels With My Camera* – will be shown on May 2.

So far there's no word of the Virginia shooter's motive, although the tabloids are saying he was a jilted boyfriend. I suppose we'll never know what was going through his head, nor the Columbine shooters' heads, nor the heads of the many other school shooters who ended the day by killing themselves. Perhaps the most instructive thing about our visit to North Pole was meeting the father of one of the ring-leaders of the shooting plot. Hearing

his story, I think, goes some way towards understanding why American kids so frequently decide to enact this dark fantasy.

The father's name is Joe, and he was fighting in Iraq when he learned that his 13-year-old son had been arrested for being in the final stages of planning a school shooting. Six boys – Joe's son included – had made a list, and their plan was to kill the kids on the list, and to do it in the cafeteria. The plot failed because the boy who was supposed to be bringing in the weapons didn't show up for school that Monday (school shootings frequently happen on a Monday). The kids were discussing rearranging when their plans were overheard.

“Were they serious?” I asked Joe when I met him last October.

“I've asked my son that point blank,” Joe replied. “I said, 'Would you have done this?' He said, 'Yes. I would have'. And he maintains that to this day. He says they would have done it.”

Joe paused.

“They were going to fire some warn-

The plot failed because the boy who was supposed to be bringing in the weapons didn't show up for school that Monday

CHILD'S PLAY

Apparently, Joe's son behaved perfectly normally over breakfast that Monday morning. He was joking around as usual, even though he believed that within a few hours he was to commit mass murder

ing shots,” he said. “There were other kids that were indirectly involved – they'd been told about the plan – they were to get certain other kids out of the cafeteria when the warning shots were fired. My son was to go to the office with a rifle and disable the communications equipment, and then they were going to start shooting the kids from the list.”

(Disabling communications equipment was a bit of a childish flourish – most children and teachers have mobile phones nowadays.)

“How many kids were on the list?” I asked Joe.

“Fifteen or 20,” Joe said. “And there was a comment on there: 'And all the other cool kids.' Who knows what that means? That's kind of open-ended, right? That's kind of subjective.”

After Joe's wife told Joe the news of the plot, he sought emergency leave. He told me it was hard to leave Iraq. “I had a sense of responsibility to my comrades,” he said. “You want to come home with your unit.”

Sometimes, during our interview, Joe sounded like a soldier making a verbal report to his commanding officer. He said things like, “At this time my son stated to me ... “ And so on. But there were other occasions when he was doing all he could to stop himself from breaking down in tears.

Joe's son was in custody when he returned from Iraq. The charge was conspiracy to commit first degree murder.

“I really didn't know how to react,” Joe said. “Part of me wanted to grab him and shake him and say, 'What is your problem?' And the other part

wanted to hug him and say, 'We'll protect you from this'.”

“What did you do?” I asked.

“I gave him a hug,” Joe said. “I said, 'I love you', and then I said, 'Sit down.' I could tell he was kind of scared. I asked him, 'Why would you do this?' He said, 'I don't know'.”

Joe said he doesn't know either. It's not like his son is a Goth, he said.

“He likes to fish,” said Joe. “He likes to go camping. He likes to make up his own jokes. The counsellor is trying to figure out why they'd do this. These kids don't fit the mould. He doesn't come from a dysfunctional family. I mean, we have our dysfunctions, but he's not abused. I don't use drugs. I don't consider myself an alcoholic. I spend time with him. I coached baseball for him when he was younger.”

Joe paused. “We have rules. He doesn't dress Goth. He's not allowed to dress Goth. He's not allowed to have baggy pants that hang down. He's not allowed to wear his hat cocked to the side and walk around looking like a little punk. We never let him have violent posters on his walls. He's not allowed to play violent video games. He's never been to the mall by himself. He doesn't have any CDs, like rap CDs, with violent themes. That kind of stuff just doesn't fit in with our lives.”

Apparently, Joe's son behaved perfectly normally over breakfast that Monday morning. He was joking around as usual, even though he believed that within a few hours he was to commit mass murder.

“His sister goes here,” Joe said. “I said to him: 'Did you tell her, so she

could get out when the shooting started?' And he said: 'No.' I said: 'What if your sister heard the shooting, worried about you, ran to see what you were doing and one of the kids shot her?' And I could see from the look on his face that those thoughts had never crossed his mind. He said to me: 'We were just going to shoot the bad kids.' And I said: 'Bullets don't care who they hit or who they kill. They go through people. They tear flesh and they go through. It doesn't matter who's on the other side.' He had not thought about that. It was not in his thought process."

The Noth Pole kids had an extremely ill-thought-out escape plan. After the shootings, they were going to run to the station and catch a train to Anchorage, where they'd create new lives for themselves using aliases. One boy's alias was going to be John Wayne. The thing is, they hadn't checked the train timetables. The shootings were going to occur at lunchtime in the cafeteria. Even if they gave themselves an hour to kill their enemies and get to the

station, they would still have had a five-hour wait on the platform for the Anchorage train.

"To even think they were going to get out of the school without being killed by the police," Joe said.

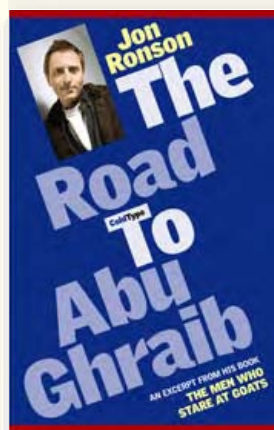
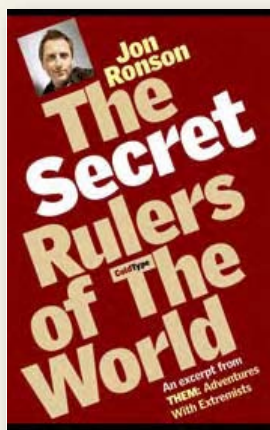
Joe's son got off quite lightly – with probation, a 5,000-word essay on the effects of school shootings across America, 100 hours of community service, and some anger regression therapy.

Joe said he's pleased and relieved nobody has thrown a brick through their window.

"I don't want people taking the law into their own hands," he said, "because I have an obligation to protect my son and the rest of my family. So if they push I'm going to have to push back. And, if that happens, it's not going to be pretty." **CT**

Jon Ronson is the author of THEM: Adventures With Extremists; The Men Who Stare at Goats; and Out of the Ordinary. His web site is jonronson.com

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DANA'S DEATH WISH

BY ANN WRIGHT

From 2001 through 2005, the governments of fourteen countries in Europe allowed at least 1,245 CIA flights with illegally abducted terrorist suspects to be flown through their airspace or to land on their territory

I hope it's your family members that die" said US Representative Dana Rohrabacker to American citizens who questioned the Bush Administration's unlawful extraordinary rendition policies.

Congressional hearings provide a deep insight into the inner spirit of our elected representatives – and sometimes, the insight is not pretty.

On April 17, we witnessed Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) unleash his unbridled anger onto members of the European Parliament's committee on Human rights who were invited guests and witnesses in the House Foreign Affairs European subcommittee hearing.

The European Parliamentary human rights committee had issued a report in January, 2007 sharply critical of the Bush administration's extraordinary rendition program in which persons from all over the world were detained by either CIA or local police and then flown by CIA jet (torture taxi) to other countries where they were imprisoned (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Libya, Djibouti,

Morocco, Yemen.) The report was equally critical of European governments for allowing the unlawful flights to take place.

From 2001 through 2005, the governments of fourteen countries in Europe allowed at least 1,245 CIA flights with illegally abducted terrorist suspects to be flown through their airspace or to land on their territory. Germany, Britain, Ireland and Portugal allowed the highest numbers of covert flights. As well as at least 1,245 flights operated by the CIA, there were an unspecified number of US military flights for the same purpose.

The European Parliament report differentiated between lawful extradition of criminal suspects for trial in another country and the unlawful abduction, sending to a third country usually noted for torture of prisoners and imprisoning for years without trial persons suspected of criminal terrorist acts.

The report acknowledged that terrorism is a threat to European countries as well as to the United States, but

the European Parliamentary committee said that terrorist acts must be handled lawfully by both European countries and by the United States. The report said: “After 11 September 2001, the so-called ‘war on terror’ – in its excesses – has produced a serious and dangerous erosion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

The extraordinary rendition program undercuts the exact liberties we are defending, the rule of law, the right for a fair and speedy trial, the right to know the evidence on which one is held and prosecuted.

Some who were kidnapped ended up in Guantanamo. Others were flown to prisons in other countries for interrogation and torture. Many of those who were subjected to extraordinary rendition are still in Guantanamo. Many have been there for more than five years. Over 400 of the 770 persons who have been imprisoned in Guantanamo over the five years it has been opened, have been released.

Only 380 are left imprisoned in Guantanamo. Only three have been charged by the Military Commission and only one tried in Guantanamo. After five years of being held prisoner, Australian citizen David Hicks was convicted in March, 2007 of material support to terrorism and sentenced to only seven months further imprisonment which he is serving in Australia. The Bush administration has said it will try only 50-70 of the 380 remaining in Guantanamo. That means that of 770 who have been in Guantanamo, only 50-70 will be tried. The others eventually will be freed due to lack of

evidence of a crime. Many will have spent five years or more in imprisonment.

According to virtually every prisoner so far released, they were tortured while imprisoned in countries such as Syria, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Some prisoners say they were tortured by police or interrogators. Some say they heard American voices in the background while they were tortured. None were charged with any crimes. None went to trial. They were abducted by CIA or local authorities at the request of the United States.

The United States did not present evidence of criminal actions nor request extradition from the country where the person was detained. Nor did a central approving authority look at the rationale for spiriting a person to the control of a third country for interrogation. Persons were “rendered” many times on the say-so of junior CIA officials.

Memories of Joe McCarthy

Back to the Congressional hearing. With eyes narrowed and mouth in a contorted grimace, Congressman Rohrabacker attacked the two British and one Italian members of the European Parliament who testified before the committee. Reminding one of Joe McCarthy in tone and substance, Rohrabacker demeaned and degraded the report and chastised, belittled and berated the Parliamentarians.

Remarkably, Rohrabacker said the most of the CIA private flights that landed in Europe were to transport CIA agents all over the world, not to move

Of 770 who have been in Guantanamo, only 50-70 will be tried. The others eventually will be freed due to lack of evidence of a crime. Many will have spent five years or more in imprisonment

Then, much to the shock and disbelief of everyone in the hearing room, Rohrabacher said to those who had expressed displeasure at his statements: "I hope it's your family members that die when terrorists strike"

prisoners. Yet the logs of the 1245 flights have been tied by date and location to the movement of specific individual prisoners from one location to another.

Rohrabacher railed against anyone who questioned the right of the Bush administration to do whatever it wanted, legal or illegal, to prevent terrorist acts and said that by not supporting the Bush policies was consigning their country to the terrorists. In particular he said that any Americans who questioned the extraordinary rendition were un-American.

Citing historic examples of other countries kidnapping persons, Rohrabacher said Israel had every right to kidnap Nazi official Adolph Eichmann from Argentina, bring him to Israel and execute him. Rohrabacher conveniently forgot to mention that the Israeli government did put Eichmann on trial, a trial which none of those who have been extraordinarily rendered have had.

Rohrabacher then attacked and belittled the European Community for outlawing the death penalty saying that "You in the European community won't stand up to evil people, you won't execute them. Eichmann deserved to be executed, just like these terrorists must be executed."

Rohrabacher never once mentioned due process, the rule of law, right to a trial for anyone picked up in the extraordinary rendition program. Merely because persons were "rendered" and imprisoned by the US meant to Rohrabacher they were guilty.

Rohrabacher said if European coun-

tries did not cooperate with the United States and go along with whatever the Bush administration wanted, they were condemning their countrymen to death by not using extralegal methods to imprison terrorist suspects.

When citizens attending the hearing, including members of Codepink Women for Peace and Veterans for Peace, heard Rohrabacher's statement, they collectively groaned. Then, much to the shock and disbelief of everyone in the hearing room, Rohrabacher said to those who had expressed displeasure at his statements: "I hope it's your family members that die when terrorists strike."

At that point, I had had enough of Rohrabacher. I stood up and said "I did not serve 29 years in the US military and 16 years in the US diplomatic corps to see demise of the rule of law and violation of our own laws. Rohrabacher's statements are outrageous. No wonder the world hates us!"

Police escort

Chairman Delahunt gaveled for me to stop speaking and I was escorted by the police out of the committee room. I was not arrested.

Remarkably, I do agree with one thing Rohrabacher said. "They hate us."

Rohrabacher finished his sentence with "They hate us because they hate our way of life." Unfortunately, many people do hate us, but it's not for our way of life.

It's for exactly the talk and actions that Rohrabacher and the Bush administration represent: illegal and unlawful actions, an arrogant attitude that

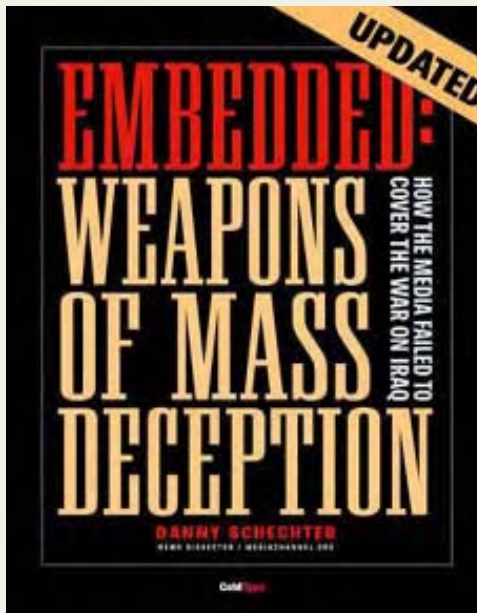
America is always right and everyone else is wrong, that the world's resources are for the exclusive use of the United States and we have the right to invade and occupy any country.”

Until we change the manner in which Presidential administrations and the Congress operate and the way we approach our membership in the community of nations, the world will continue to question what America stands for.

CT

Ann Wright retired as a Colonel after serving 13 years on active duty and 16 years in the US Army Reserves. After 16 years in the US diplomatic corps, she resigned in March, 2003 in opposition to the war on Iraq. She had been assigned in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia and Mongolia. She helped reopen the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan in December, 2001.

This article originally appeared on the web site AfterDowningStreet.org



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LAND OF THE FREE, HOME OF TERROR

BY WILLIAM BLUM

US officials had to know that once they offered payments to a very poor area to turn in bodies that almost anyone was fair game

“They told us this was one of the world’s worst terrorists, and he got the sentence of a drunken driver,” said Ben Wizner, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, referring to David Hicks, a 31-year-old Australian who in a plea bargain with a US military court will serve nine months in prison, largely in Australia. That’s after five years at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba without being charged with a crime, without a trial, without a conviction.

Under the deal, Hicks agreed not to talk to reporters for one year (a slap in the face of free speech), to forever waive any profit from telling his story (a slap – mon Dieu! – in the face of free enterprise), to submit to US interrogation and testify at future US trials or international tribunals (an open invitation to the US government to hound the young man for the rest of his life), to renounce any claims of mistreatment or unlawful detention (a requirement which would be unconstitutional in a civilian US court).

“If the United States were not

ashamed of its conduct, it wouldn’t hide behind a gag order,” said Wizner.)^[1]

Like so many other “terrorists” held by the United States in recent years, Hicks had been “sold” to the American military for a bounty offered by the US, a phenomenon repeated frequently in Afghanistan and Pakistan. US officials had to know that once they offered payments to a very poor area to turn in bodies that almost anyone was fair game.

Other “terrorists” have been turned in as reprisals for all sorts of personal hatreds and feuds.

Many others – abroad and in the United States – have been incarcerated by the United States simply for working for, or merely contributing money to, charitable organizations with alleged or real ties to a “terrorist organization”, as determined by a list kept by the State Department, a list conspicuously political.

It was recently disclosed that an Iraqi resident of Britain is being released from Guantánamo after four

years. His crime? He refused to work as an informer for the CIA and MI5, the British security service. His business partner is still being held in Guantánamo, for the same crime.^[2]

Finally, there are those many other poor souls who have been picked up simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. “Most of these guys weren’t fighting. They were running,” General Martin Lucenti, former deputy commander of Guantánamo, has pointed out.^[3]

Thousands of people thrown into hell on earth for no earthly good reason. The world media has been overflowing with their individual tales of horror and sadness for five very long years. Said Guantánamo’s former commander, General Jay Hood: “Sometimes we just didn’t get the right folks.”^[4] Not that the torture they were put through would be justified if they were in fact “the right folks”.

Hicks was taken into custody in Afghanistan in 2001. He was a convert to Islam and like many others from many countries had gone to Afghanistan for religious reasons, had wound up on the side of the Taliban in the civil war that had been going on since the early 1990s, and had received military training at a Taliban camp.

The United States has insisted on calling such camps “terrorist training camps”, or “anti-American terrorist training camps”, or “al-Qaeda terrorist training camps”. Almost every individual or group not in love with US foreign policy, which Washington wants to stigmatize, is charged with being associated with, or being a member of, al

Qaeda, as if there’s a precise and meaningful distinction between people retaliating against American imperialism while being a member of al Qaeda and retaliating against American imperialism while NOT being a member of al Qaeda; as if al Qaeda gives out membership cards to fit into your wallet, as if there are chapters of al Qaeda that put out a weekly newsletter and hold a potluck on the first Monday of each month.

It should be noted that for nearly half a century much of southern Florida has been one big training camp for anti-Castro terrorists. None of their groups – which have carried out many hundreds of serious terrorist acts in the US as well as abroad, including bombing a passenger airplane in flight – are on the State Department list. Nor were the Contras of Nicaragua in the 1980s, heavily supported by the United States, about whom former CIA Director Stansfield Turner testified: “I believe it is irrefutable that a number of the Contras’ actions have to be characterized as terrorism, as State-supported terrorism.”^[5]

The same applies to groups in Kosovo and Bosnia, with close ties to al Qaeda, including Osama bin Laden, in the recent past, but which have allied themselves with Washington’s agenda in the former Yugoslavia since the 1990s. Now we learn of US support for a Pakistani group, called Jundullah and led by a Taliban, which has taken responsibility for the recent kidnappings and deaths and of more than a dozen Iranian soldiers and officials in cross-border attacks.^[6] Do not hold your

It should be noted that for nearly half a century much of southern Florida has been one big training camp for anti-Castro terrorists. None of their groups are on the State Department list

American officials have associated certain travel routes with al Qaeda, when in fact, says the report, the routes “involve ordinary connecting flights in major international airports”

breath waiting for the name Jundallah to appear on the State Department list of terrorist organizations; nor any of the several other ethnic militias being supported by the CIA to carry out terrorist bombing and assassination attacks in Iran.^[7]

The same political selectivity applies to many of the groups which are on the list, particularly those opposed to American or Israeli policies. Amid pressure from their home countries and international human rights advocates, scores of Guantánamo detainees have been quietly repatriated in the past three years.

Now, a new analysis by lawyers who have represented detainees at this 21st century Devil’s Island says this policy undermines Washington’s own claims about the threat posed by many of the prison camp’s residents. The report, based on US government case files for Saudi detainees sent home over the past three years, shows inmates being systematically freed from custody within weeks of their return. In half the cases studied, the detainees had been turned over to US forces by Pakistani police or troops in return for financial rewards.

Many others were accused of terrorism connections in part because their Arab nicknames matched those found in a computer database of al-Qaeda members, documents show. In December, a survey by the Associated Press found that 84 percent of released detainees – 205 out of 245 individuals whose cases could be tracked – were set free after being released to the custody of their native countries.

“There are certainly bad people in Guantánamo Bay, but there are also other cases where it’s hard to understand why the people are still there,” said Anant Raut, co-author of the report, who has visited the detention camp three times. “We were struggling to find some rationality, something to comfort us that it wasn’t just random. But we didn’t find it.”

The report states that many of the US attempts to link the detainees to terrorism groups were based on evidence the authors describe as circumstantial and “highly questionable”, such as the travel routes the detainees had followed in flying commercially from one Middle East country to another.

American officials have associated certain travel routes with al Qaeda, when in fact, says the report, the routes “involve ordinary connecting flights in major international airports.” With regard to accusations based on similar names, the report states: “This accusation appears to be based upon little more than similarities in the transliterations of a detainee’s name and a name found on one of the hard drives.”

Raut said he was most struck by the high percentage of Saudi detainees who had been captured and turned over by Pakistani forces. In effect, he said, for at least half of the group in the study, the United States “had no first-hand knowledge of their activities” in Afghanistan before their capture and imprisonment.^[8]

When Michael Scheuer, former CIA officer who headed the Agency’s Osama bin Laden unit, was told that the

largest group in Guantánamo came from custody in Pakistan, he said: “We absolutely got the wrong people.”^[9]

Never mind. They were all treated equally. All thrown into solitary confinement. Shackled, blindfolded, excruciating physical contortions for long periods, denied medicine. Sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation. And two dozen other methods of torture which American officials do not call torture. (If you torture these officials, they might admit that it “torture lite”.)

“The idea is to build an antiterrorist global environment,” a senior American defense official said in 2003, “so that in 20 to 30 years, terrorism will be like slave-trading, completely discredited.”^[10]

When will the dropping of bombs on innocent civilians by the United States, and invading and occupying their country, without their country attacking or threatening the US, become completely discredited? When will the use of depleted uranium and cluster bombs and CIA torture renditions become things that even men like George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld will be too embarrassed to defend?

Australian/British journalist John Pilger has noted that in George Orwell’s 1984 “three slogans dominate society: war is peace, freedom is slavery and ignorance is strength. Today’s slogan, war on terrorism, also reverses meaning. The war is terrorism.”

Throwing the earth on the mercy of the market

Al Gore appeared before a House En-

ergy and Commerce Committee hearing on global warming on March 21. The star of “An Inconvenient Truth” was told by Cong. Joe Barton of Texas: “You’re not just off a little – you’re totally wrong.” In the afternoon Gore testified before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, during which the former vice president was told by Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma: “You’ve been so extreme in some of your expressions that you’re losing some of your own people.”^[11]

These members of Congress know the facts of economic life in the United States. Fighting global warming is a threat to the principal human generator of it – corporations – who avail themselves of the best congress members money can buy to keep government regulations as weak as can be.

Does Al Gore know the same facts of American economic life? Of course, but you would have a hard time discerning that from his film. It’s as cowardly in dealing with the corporations as Gore was in fighting the theft of the 2000 election. In the film’s hour and a half, the words “corporations” or “profit” are not heard.

The closest he comes to ascribing a link between the rape of the environment and the incessant corporate drive to optimize profits is a single passing mention of American automakers’ reluctance to increase car gas mileage.

He discusses the link between tobacco and lung cancer, as an example of how we have to “connect the dots” on environmental issues, with no mention of the tobacco corporations or their gross and deliberate deception of

The star of “An Inconvenient Truth” was told by Cong. Joe Barton of Texas: “You’re not just off a little – you’re totally wrong”

Leading European investigative reporter Duncan Campbell revealed that NSA had arranged with Microsoft to insert special "keys" into Windows operating systems, beginning with Windows 95

the American people. He states at another point that we must choose the environment over the economy, without any elucidation at all. Otherwise, the film's message is that it's up to the individual to change his habits, to campaign for renewable energy, and to write his congress member about this or that. In summary, the basic problem, he tells us, is that we're lacking "political will".

It would be most interesting if Al Gore were the president to see how tough he'd get with the corporations, which every day, around the clock, are faced with choices: one method of operation available being the least harmful to the environment, another method being the least harmful to the bottom line.

Of course, Gore was vice-president for eight years and was in a fantastic and enviable position to pressure the corporations to mend their ways and Congress to enact tougher regulations; as well as to educate the public on more than their own bad habits.

But what exactly did he do? Can any readers enlighten me as to what extent the man used his position and his power then in a manner consistent with the image and the word of his new film?

But could Gore be elected without corporate money? And how much of that money would reach his pocket if he advocated (choke, gasp!) free government-paid public transportation – rail, bus, ferry, etc.?

That would give birth to a breathtaking – or rather, breath enhancing – reduction in automobile pollution; eas-

ily paid for by ceasing America's imperialist wars.

Microsoft and the National Security Agency

I have long felt that the American media's gravest shortcoming is its errors of omission, rather than its errors of commission. It's what they leave out that distorts the news more than any factual errors or out-and-out lies. In January the Washington Post reported that Microsoft had announced that its new operating system, Vista, was being brought to us with the assistance of the National Security Agency.

The NSA said it helped to protect the operating system from worms, Trojan horses and other insidious computer attackers. "Our intention is to help everyone with security," said the NSA's chief of vulnerability analysis and operations group. The spy agency, which provided its service free, said it was Microsoft's idea to acknowledge NSA's role, although the software giant declined to be specific about NSA's contributions to Vista.^[12]

What the Post – and most likely the entirety of mainstream American media – do not remind us of is what came out in 1999 and 2000, although it's all over the Internet.

In September 1999, leading European investigative reporter Duncan Campbell revealed that NSA had arranged with Microsoft to insert special "keys" into Windows operating systems, beginning with Windows 95. An American computer scientist, Andrew Fernandez of Cryptonym in North Carolina, had disassembled parts of the

Windows instruction code and found the smoking gun – Microsoft’s developers had failed to remove the debugging symbols used to test this software before they released it. Inside the code were the labels for two keys. One was called “KEY”. The other was called “NSAKEY”. Fernandez presented his finding at a conference at which some Windows developers were also in attendance.

The developers did not deny that the NSA key was built into their software, but they refused to talk about what the key did, or why it had been put there without users’ knowledge. Fernandez says that NSA’s “back door” in the world’s most commonly used operating system makes it “orders of magnitude easier for the US government to access your computer.”^[13]

In February 2000, it was disclosed that the Strategic Affairs Delegation (DAS), the intelligence arm of the French Defense Ministry, had prepared a report in 1999 which also asserted that NSA had helped to install secret programs in Microsoft software. According to the DAS report, “it would seem that the creation of Microsoft was largely supported, not least financially, by the NSA, and that IBM was made to accept the [Microsoft] MS-DOS operating system by the same administration.”

The report stated that there had been a “strong suspicion of a lack of security fed by insistent rumours about the existence of spy programmes on Microsoft, and by the presence of NSA personnel in Bill Gates’ development teams.” Microsoft categorically denied

all the charges and the French Defense Ministry said that it did not necessarily stand by the report, which was written by “outside experts”.^[14]

In case the above disturbs your image of Bill Gates and his buddies as a bunch of long-haired, liberal, peace-nik computer geeks, and the company as one of the non-military-oriented halfway decent corporations, the DAS report states that the Pentagon at the time was Microsoft’s biggest client in the world.

The Israeli military has also been an important client. In 2002, the company erected enormous billboards in Israel which bore the Microsoft logo under the text “From the depth of our heart – thanks to The Israeli Defense Forces”, with the Israeli national flag in the background.^[15]

The myth of the Good War

Readers of this report will be aware that one of the points I try very hard to convey is that the reason so many Americans support US atrocities abroad is that they’re convinced that no matter how bad things may look, the government means well.

American leaders may make mistakes, they may blunder, they may lie, they may even on the odd occasion cause more harm than good, but they do mean well. Their intentions are honorable. Of that most Americans are certain. And one of the foundation stones for this edifice of patriotic faith is the Second World War, an historical saga that all Americans are taught about from childhood on. We all know what its real name is: “The Good War”.

Fernandez says that NSA's "back door" in the world's most commonly used operating system makes it "orders of magnitude easier for the US government to access your computer"

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Stalin learned enough about these schemes to at least partially explain his post-war suspicious manner toward his "allies"

Which leads me to recommend a book, "The Myth of the Good War", by Jacques Pauwels, published in 2002. It's very well done, well argued and documented, an easy read.

I particularly like the sections dealing with the closing months of the European campaign, during which the United States and Great Britain contemplated stabbing their Soviet ally in the back with maneuvers like a separate peace with Germany, using German troops to fight the Russians, and sabotaging legal attempts by various Communist Parties and other elements of the European left to share in (highly earned) political power after the war. This last was of course very effectively realized.

Stalin learned enough about these schemes to at least partially explain his post-war suspicious manner toward his "allies". In the West we called it "paranoia".^[16]

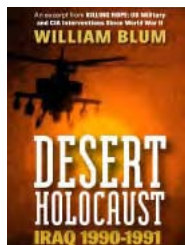
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- [1] Seattle Times, March 31, 2007
- [2] Washington Post, March 30, 2007, p.11
- [3] Financial Times (London), Oct 4, 2004
- [4] Wall Street Journal, January 26, 2005
- [5] Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, April 16, 1985

- [6] ABC News, April 3, 2007
- [7] Sunday Telegraph (London), February 25, 2007
- [8] Washington Post, March 18, 2007
- [9] Richard Ackland, "Innocence ignored at Guantanamo", Sydney Morning Herald, February 24, 2006.
- [10] New York Times, January 17, 2003, p.10
- [11] Washington Post, March 22, 2007, p.2
- [12] Washington Post, January 9, 2007. p.D1
- [13] Duncan Campbell's article of September 3, 1999 can be found on the website of TechWeb: <http://www.techweb.com/wire/29110640>
- [14] Agence France Presse, February 18 and 21, 2000
- [15] To see one of the billboards: www.inminds.co.uk/boycott-news-0022.html
- [16] http://www.alya.be/pauwels/2publi_the_myth.htm
Available in English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Dutch editions

William Blum is the author of Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2; Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower; West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir; and Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire



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THE GREAT CRISIS OF MODERN TIMES

BY JOHN PILGER

The Israeli journalist Amira Hass describes the moment her mother, Hannah, was marched from a cattle train to the Nazi concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. “They were sick and some were dying,” she says. “Then my mother saw these German women looking at the prisoners, just looking. This image became very formative in my upbringing, this despicable ‘looking from the side’.”

It is time we in Britain and other Western countries stopped looking from the side. We are being led towards perhaps the most serious crisis in modern history as the Bush-Cheney-Blair “long war” edges closer to Iran for no reason other than that nation’s independence from rapacious America. The safe delivery of the 15 British sailors into the hands of Rupert Murdoch and his rivals (with tales of their “ordeal” almost certainly authored by the Ministry of Defence – until it got the wind up) is both a farce and a distraction. The Bush administration, in secret connivance with Blair, has spent four years

preparing for “Operation Iranian Freedom”. Forty-five cruise missiles are primed to strike. According to Russia’s leading strategic thinker General Leonid Ivashov: “Nuclear facilities will be secondary targets... at least 20 such facilities need to be destroyed. Combat nuclear weapons may be used. This will result in the radioactive contamination of all the Iranian territory, and beyond.”

And yet there is a surreal silence, save for the noise of “news” in which our powerful broadcasters gesture cryptically at the obvious but dare not make sense of it, lest the one-way moral screen erected between us and the consequences of an imperial foreign policy collapse and the truth be revealed. John Bolton, formerly Bush’s man at the United Nations, recently spelled out the truth: that the Bush-Cheney-Blair plan for the Middle East is an agenda to maintain division and instability. In other words, bloodshed and chaos equals control. He was referring to Iraq, but he also meant Iran.

One million Iraqis fill the streets of Najaf demanding that Bush and Blair

John Bolton, formerly Bush’s man at the United Nations, recently spelled out the truth: that the Bush-Cheney-Blair plan for the Middle East is an agenda to maintain division and instability. In other words, bloodshed and chaos equals control

Declassified files make it clear that British governments have borne "significant responsibility" for the direct or indirect deaths of between 8.6 million and 13.5 million people throughout the world from military interventions and at the hands of regimes strongly supported by Britain

get out of their homeland – that is the real news: not our nabbed sailor-spies, nor the political danse macabre of the pretenders to Blair's Duce delusions.

Whether it is treasurer Gordon Brown, the paymaster of the Iraq bloodbath, or John Reid, who sent British troops to pointless deaths in Afghanistan, or any of the others who sat through cabinet meetings knowing that Blair and his acolytes were lying through their teeth, only mutual distrust separates them now. They knew about Blair's plotting with Bush. They knew about the fake 45-minute "warning". They knew about the fitting up of Iran as the next "enemy".

Declared Brown to the Daily Mail: "The days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over. We should celebrate much of our past rather than apologise for it." In his book, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, the historian Mike Davis documents that as many as 21 million Indians died unnecessarily in famines criminally imposed by British colonial policies.

Moreover, since the formal demise of that glorious imperium, declassified files make it clear that British governments have borne "significant responsibility" for the direct or indirect deaths of between 8.6 million and 13.5 million people throughout the world from military interventions and at the hands of regimes strongly supported by Britain. The historian Mark Curtis calls these victims "unpeople". Rejoice! said Margaret Thatcher. Celebrate! says Brown. Spot the difference.

Brown is no different from Hillary Clinton, John Edwards and the other

warmongering Democrats he admires and who support an unprovoked attack on Iran and the subjugation of the Middle East to "our interests" – and Israel's, of course. Nothing has changed since the US and Britain destroyed Iran's democratic government in 1953 and installed Reza Shah Pahlavi, whose regime had "the highest rate of death penalties in the world, no valid system of civilian courts and a history of torture" that was "beyond belief" (Amnesty).

Humane principles

Look behind the one-way moral screen and you will distinguish the Blairite elite by its loathing of the humane principles that mark a real democracy. They used to be discreet about this, but no more.

Two examples spring to mind. In 2004, Blair used the secretive "royal prerogative" to overturn a high court judgment that had restored the very principle of human rights set out in Magna Carta to the people of the Chagos Islands, a British colony in the Indian Ocean. There was no debate. As ruthless as any dictator, Blair dealt his coup de grâce with the lawless expulsion of the islanders from their homeland, now a US military base, from which Bush has bombed Iraq and Afghanistan and will bomb Iran.

In the second example, only the degree of suffering is different. Last October, the *Lancet* published research by Johns Hopkins University in the US and al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad which calculated that 655,000 Iraqis had died as a direct result of the

Anglo-American invasion. Downing Street officials derided the study as “flawed”. They were lying. They knew that the chief scientific adviser to the Ministry of Defence, Sir Roy Anderson, had backed the survey, describing its methods as “robust” and “close to best practice”, and other government officials had secretly approved the “tried and tested way of measuring mortality in conflict zones”.

The figure for Iraqi deaths is now estimated at close to a million – carnage equivalent to that caused by the Anglo-American economic siege of Iraq in the 1990s, which produced the deaths of half a million infants under the age of five, verified by Unicef. That, too, was dismissed contemptuously by Blair.

“This Labour government, which includes Gordon Brown as much as it does Tony Blair,” wrote Richard Horton, editor of the *Lancet*, “is party to a war crime of monstrous proportions. Yet our political consensus prevents any judicial or civil society response. Britain is paralysed by its own indifference.”

Such is the scale of the crime and of our “looking from the side”. According to the *Observer* of 8 April, the voters’ “damning verdict” on the Blair regime is expressed by a majority who have “lost faith” in their government.

No surprise there. Polls have long shown a widespread revulsion to Blair, demonstrated at the last general election, which produced the second lowest turnout since the franchise.

No mention was made of the *Observer*’s own contribution to this national loss of faith. Once celebrated as a

bastion of liberalism that stood against Anthony Eden’s lawless attack on Egypt in 1956, the new right-wing, lifestyle *Observer* enthusiastically backed Blair’s lawless attack on Iraq, having helped lay the ground with major articles falsely linking Iraq with the 9/11 attacks – claims now regarded even by the Pentagon as fake.

Fabricated hysteria

As hysteria is again fabricated, for Iraq, read Iran. According to the former US treasury secretary Paul O’Neill, the Bush cabal decided to attack Iraq on “day one” of Bush’s administration, long before 11 September 2001. The main reason was oil. O’Neill was shown a Pentagon document entitled “Foreign Suitors for Iraqi Oilfield Contracts”, which outlined the carve-up of Iraq’s oil wealth among the major Anglo-American companies. Under a law written by US and British officials, the Iraqi puppet regime is about to hand over the extraction of the largest concentration of oil on earth to Anglo-American companies.

Nothing like this piracy has happened before in the modern Middle East, where Opec has ensured that oil business is conducted between states. Across the Shatt al-Arab waterway is another prize: Iran’s vast oilfields. Just as non-existent weapons of mass destruction or facile concerns for democracy had nothing to do with the invasion of Iraq, so non-existent nuclear weapons have nothing to do with the coming American onslaught on Iran.

Unlike Israel and the United States,

Polls have long shown a widespread revulsion to Blair, demonstrated at the last general election, which produced the second lowest turnout since the franchise

DEADLY LEGACY

In 2001, few Britons knew that 3,000 innocent Afghan civilians were bombed to death as revenge for the attacks of 11 September. No Afghans brought down the twin towers

Iran has abided by the rules of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which it was an original signatory, and has allowed routine inspections under its legal obligations. The International Atomic Energy Agency has never cited Iran for diverting its civilian programme to military use. For the past three years, IAEA inspectors have said they have been allowed to “go anywhere”. The recent UN Security Council sanctions against Iran are the result of Washington’s bribery.

Abuser of human rights

Until recently, the British were unaware that their government was one of the world’s most consistent abusers of human rights and backers of state terrorism.

Few Britons knew that the Muslim Brotherhood, the forerunner of al-Qaeda, was sponsored by British intelligence as a means of systematically destroying secular Arab nationalism, or that MI6 recruited young British Muslims in the 1980s as part of a \$4bn Anglo-American-backed jihad against the Soviet Union known as “Operation Cyclone”.

In 2001, few Britons knew that 3,000 innocent Afghan civilians were bombed to death as revenge for the attacks of 11 September. No Afghans brought down the twin towers.

Thanks to Bush and Blair, awareness in Britain and all over the world has risen as never before. When home-grown terrorists struck London in July 2005, few doubted that the attack on Iraq had provoked the atrocity and that the bombs which killed 52 Lon-

doners were, in effect, Blair’s bombs.

In my experience, most people do not indulge the absurdity and cruelty of the “rules” of rampant power. They do not contort their morality and intellect to comply with double standards and the notion of approved evil, of worthy and unworthy victims. They would, if they knew, grieve for all the lives, families, careers, hopes and dreams destroyed by Blair and Bush.

The sure evidence is the British public’s wholehearted response to the 2004 tsunami, shaming that of the government.

Certainly, they would agree wholeheartedly with Robert H Jackson, chief of counsel for the United States at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders at the end of the Second World War. “Crimes are crimes,” he said, “whether the United States does them or whether Germany does them, and we are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct which we would not be willing to have invoked against us.”

As with Henry Kissinger and Donald Rumsfeld, who dare not travel to certain countries for fear of being prosecuted as war criminals, Blair as a private citizen may no longer be untouchable.

On 20 March, Baltasar Garzón, the tenacious Spanish judge who pursued Augusto Pinochet, called for indictments against those responsible for “one of the most sordid and unjustifiable episodes in recent human history” – Iraq. Five days later, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, to which Britain is a signatory, said that Blair could one day face war-

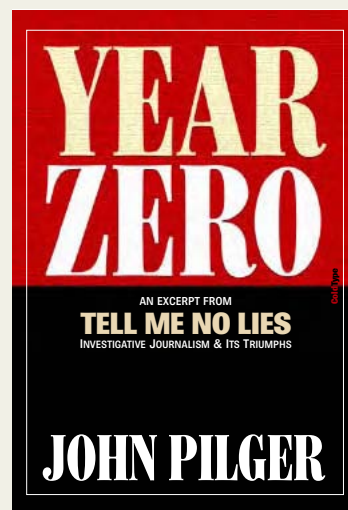
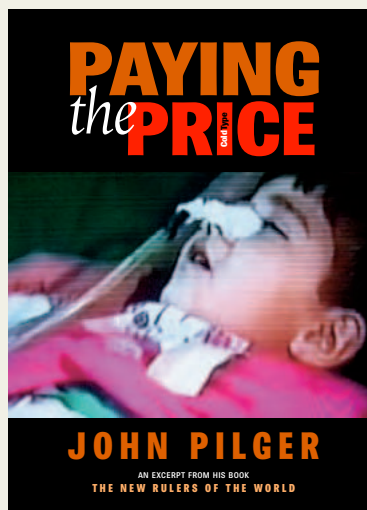
crimes charges.

These are critical changes in the way the sane world thinks – again, thanks to the Reich of Blair and Bush. However, we live in the most dangerous of times. On 6 April, Blair accused “elements of the Iranian regime” of “backing, financing, arming and supporting terrorism in Iraq”. He offered no evidence, and the Ministry of Defence has

none. This is the same Goebbels-like refrain with which he and his coterie, Gordon Brown included, brought an epic bloodletting to Iraq. How long will the rest of us continue looking from the side? **CT**

John Pilger's latest book is Freedom Next Time. This essay was first published in Britain's New Statesman.

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www.coldtype.net/pilgerbooks.html

THE KING YOU DON'T SEE ON TV

BY NORMAN SOLOMON & JEFF COHEN

Noting that a majority of Americans below the poverty line were white, King developed a class perspective. He decried the huge income gaps between rich and poor, and called for "radical changes in the structure of our society" to redistribute wealth and power

It's become a TV ritual: Every year on April 4, as Americans commemorate Martin Luther King's death, we get perfunctory network news reports about "the slain civil rights leader."

The remarkable thing about these reviews of King's life is that several years — his last years — are totally missing, as if flushed down a memory hole.

What TV viewers see is a closed loop of familiar file footage: King battling desegregation in Birmingham (1963); reciting his dream of racial harmony at the rally in Washington (1963); marching for voting rights in Selma, Alabama (1965); and finally, lying dead on the motel balcony in Memphis (1968).

An alert viewer might notice that the chronology jumps from 1965 to 1968. Yet King didn't take a sabbatical near the end of his life. In fact, he was speaking and organizing as diligently as ever.

Almost all of those speeches were filmed or taped. But they're not shown today on TV.

Why? It's because national news media have never come to terms with

what Martin Luther King Jr. stood for during his final years.

In the early 1960s, when King focused his challenge on legalized racial discrimination in the South, most major media were his allies. Network TV and national publications graphically showed the police dogs and bullwhips and cattle prods used against Southern blacks who sought the right to vote or to eat at a public lunch counter.

But after passage of civil rights acts in 1964 and 1965, King began challenging the nation's fundamental priorities. He maintained that civil rights laws were empty without "human rights" — including economic rights. For people too poor to eat at a restaurant or afford a decent home, King said, anti-discrimination laws were hollow.

Noting that a majority of Americans below the poverty line were white, King developed a class perspective. He decried the huge income gaps between rich and poor, and called for "radical changes in the structure of our society" to redistribute wealth and power.

"True compassion," King declared, "is

more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”

By 1967, King had also become the country’s most prominent opponent of the Vietnam War, and a staunch critic of overall U.S. foreign policy, which he deemed militaristic. In his “Beyond Vietnam” speech delivered at New York’s Riverside Church on April 4, 1967 – a year to the day before he was murdered – King called the United States “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”

From Vietnam to South Africa to Latin America, King said, the U.S. was “on the wrong side of a world revolution.” King questioned “our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America,” and asked why the U.S. was suppressing revolutions “of the shirtless and barefoot people” in the Third World, instead of supporting them.

Problems of capitalism

In foreign policy, King also offered an economic critique, complaining about “capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries.”

You haven’t heard the “Beyond Vietnam” speech on network news retrospectives, but national media heard it loud and clear back in 1967 — and loudly denounced it. Time magazine called it “demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi.” The Washington Post patronized that “King has diminished his usefulness to his cause, his country, his people.”

In his last months, King was organizing the most militant project of his life: the Poor People’s Campaign. He crisscrossed the country to assemble “a multiracial army of the poor” that would descend on Washington – engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience at the Capitol, if need be – until Congress enacted a poor people’s bill of rights. Reader’s Digest warned of an “insurrection.”

King’s economic bill of rights called for massive government jobs programs to rebuild America’s cities. He saw a crying need to confront a Congress that had demonstrated its “hostility to the poor” – appropriating “military funds with alacrity and generosity,” but providing “poverty funds with miserliness.”

How familiar that sounds today, nearly 40 years after King’s efforts on behalf of the poor people’s mobilization were cut short by an assassin’s bullet.

In 2007, in this nation of immense wealth, the White House and most in Congress continue to accept the perpetuation of poverty. They fund foreign wars with “alacrity and generosity,” while being miserly in dispensing funds for education and healthcare and environmental cleanup.

And those priorities are largely unquestioned by mainstream media. No surprise that they tell us so little about the last years of Martin Luther King’s life. **CT**

Norman Solomon is the author of “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.” Jeff Cohen is the author of “Cable News Confidential: My Misadventures in Corporate Media.”

From Vietnam to South Africa to Latin America, King said, the U.S. was “on the wrong side of a world revolution”

MY NAME USED TO BE #200343

BY DAVID PHINNEY

"If they can do this to a former Navy man and an American, what is happening to people in facilities all over the world run by the American government?"

A year ago, Donald Vance learned what it's like to be falsely accused by the U.S. military of aiding terrorists. He was held without charge for more than three months in a high-security prison in Iraq, and interrogated daily after sleepless nights without legal counsel or even a phone call to his family.

Last month, the former private security contractor was honored for his ordeal in Washington and for speaking out against the incident. At a luncheon at the National Press Club, Vance received the Ridenhour Prize for Truth-Telling, an award named in memory of Army helicopter gunner Ron Ridenhour who struggled to bring the horrific mass murders at My Lai to the attention of Congress and the Pentagon during the Vietnam War.

Vance was joined by former president Jimmy Carter, who won a lifetime achievement award, and journalist Rajiv Chandrasekaran of *The Washington Post* who was recognized for his recent book, *"Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone"*.

As hundreds at the luncheon finished

their salad, Vance, a two-time George W. Bush voter and Navy veteran, recounted the events of his imprisonment and the grief of his fiancé and family. They did not know if he was alive or dead, he said. They were already making inquiries to the U.S. State Department on how to ship his body home.

He then drew a wider circle around his ordeal to include the countless others who have been held falsely without charge and denied normal legal constitutional protections under law. "My name used to be 200343," Vance said recalling his prisoner ID. "If they can do this to a former Navy man and an American, what is happening to people in facilities all over the world run by the American government?"

Vance's nightmare began last year on Apr. 15 when he and co-worker Nathan Ertel barricaded themselves in a Baghdad office after their employer, an Iraqi private security firm, took away their ID tags. They feared for their lives because they suspected the company was involved in selling unauthorized guns on the black market and other nefarious ac-

tivity. A U.S. military squad freed them from the red zone in Baghdad after a friend at the U.S. embassy advised him to call for help.

Once they reached the U.S.-controlled Green Zone, government officials took them inside the embassy, listened to their individual accounts and then sent them to a trailer outside for sleep. Two or three hours later, before the crack of dawn, U.S. military personnel woke them. This time, however, Vance and Ertel, Shield Security's contract manager, were under arrest. Soldiers bound their wrists with zip ties and covered their eyes with goggles blacked out with duct tape.

The two were then escorted to a humvee and driven first to possibly Camp Prosperity and then to Camp Cropper, a high-security prison near the Baghdad airport where Saddam Hussein was once kept. Vance says he was denied body armour and helmet while traveling through the perilous Baghdad streets outside the safety of the Green Zone or a U.S. military installation.

It was not the way the tall 29-year-old with an easy charm and keen mind had expected to be treated. Vance claims that during the months leading up to his arrest, he worked as an unpaid informant for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Sometimes twice a day, he would share information with an agent in Chicago about the Iraqi-owned Shield Group Security, whose principals and managers appeared to be involved in weapons deals and violence against Iraqi civilians. One company employee regularly bartered alcohol with U.S. military personnel in exchange for ammunition they delivered, Vance said.

"He called it the bullets for beer programme," Vance claimed while relating the incident during an interview this week at a cigar bar just walking distance from the White House.

But his interrogators at Camp Cropper weren't impressed. Instead, his jailers insisted that Vance and Ertel had been detained and imprisoned because the two worked for Shield Group Security where large caches of weapons have been found – weapons that may have been intended for possible distribution to insurgents and terrorist groups, Vance said.

In a lawsuit now pending against former Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and "other unidentified agents," Vance and Ertel accuse their U.S. government captors of subjecting them to psychological torture day and night. Lights were kept on in their cell around the clock. They endured solitary confinement. They had only thin plastic mattresses on concrete for sleeping. Meals were of powdered milk and bread or rice and chicken, interrupted by selective deprivation of food and water. Heavy metal and country music screamed in their ears for hours on end, their legal complaint alleges.

They lived through "conditions of confinement and interrogation tantamount to torture", says the lawsuit filed in northern Illinois U.S. District Court. "Their interrogators utilised the types of physically and mentally coercive tactics that are supposedly reserved for terrorists and so-called enemy combatants."

Rumsfeld is singled out as the key defendant because he played a critical role in establishing a policy of "unlawful detention and torment" that Vance, Ertel and countless others in the "war on ter-

He was denied body armour and helmet while traveling through the perilous Baghdad streets outside the safety of the Green Zone or a U.S. military installation

He believes these officials conspired to jail the two not because they worked for a security company suspected of selling weapons to insurgents, but because they were sharing information with law enforcement agents outside the control of U.S. officials in Baghdad

ror” have endured, the lawsuit asserts, noting that the former defence secretary and other high-level military commanders acting at his direction developed and authorised a policy that allows government officials unilateral discretion to designate possible enemies of the United States. Because the incident and allegations are in litigation, the Pentagon has no comment, spokesman Army Lieut. Col. Mark Ballesteros said. He referred all inquiries to the U.S. Justice Department, which also had no comment for similar reasons.

Darker allegations

But darker allegations are included in the complaint over false imprisonment. Because he worked with the FBI, Vance contends, U.S. government officials in Iraq decided to retaliate against him and Ertel. He believes these officials conspired to jail the two not because they worked for a security company suspected of selling weapons to insurgents, but because they were sharing information with law enforcement agents outside the control of U.S. officials in Baghdad.

“In other words,” claims the lawsuit, “United States officials in Iraq were concerned and wanted to find out about what intelligence agents in the United States knew about their territory and their operations. The unconstitutional policies that Rumsfeld and other unidentified agents had implemented for ‘enemies’ provided ample cover to detain plaintiffs and interrogate them toward that end.”

It may take some time to sort out the allegations as the legal process grinds forward, but, in the meantime, Vance is

raising new questions about his detention. He still wonders why his jailers didn’t just call the FBI and have him cleared. They had access to his computer and cell phone to determine if his claims were true.

“When I told them to do that, they just got angry and told me to stop answering questions I wasn’t being asked,” Vance said. “I think they were butting heads with the State Department. I just snitched on the wrong people. I took the bull by the horns and got the horn.”

And why weren’t managers with the Shield Group held and interrogated?

Interrogators were certainly interested in these other individuals, according to the lawsuit. They wanted to know about the company’s structure, its political contacts, and its owners – most of whom are related to a long-established Iraqi family who fled Iraq during the years the country was ruled by Saddam Hussein, Vance said.

More startling even now is that the company has reformed. At the time they left, Shield Security held U.S.-funded contracts with the Iraqi government, Iraqi companies, NGOs and U.S. contractors. As far as Vance knows, the company still does – but under a different name: National Shield Security.

“I built their web site,” he said. “And they are still being awarded millions of dollars in contracts.” **CT**

David Phinney is a journalist and broadcaster based in Washington, DC, whose work has appeared in The Los Angeles Times, New York Times and on ABC and PBS. He can be contacted at: phinney-david@yahoo.com.

CRUSHING FEAR STALKS AMERICA

BY ROBERT FISK

There's a helluva difference between Cairo University and the campus of Valdosta in the Deep South of the United States. I visited both recently and I feel like I've been travelling on a gloomy spaceship – or maybe a time machine – with just two distant constellations to guide my journey. One is clearly named Iraq; the other is Fear. They have a lot in common.

The politics department at Cairo's vast campus is run by Dr Mona El-Baradei – yes, she is indeed the sister of the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency – and her students, most of them young women, almost all scarved, duly wrote out their questions at the end of the turgid Fisk lecture on the failings of journalism in the Middle East.

“Why did you invade Iraq?” was one. I didn't like the “you” bit, but the answer was “oil”. “What do you think of the Egyptian government?”

At this, I looked at my watch. I reckon, I told the students, that I just had time to reach Cairo airport for my

flight before Hosni Mubarak's intelligence lads heard of my reply.

Much nervous laughter.

Well, I said, new constitutional amendments to enshrine emergency legislation into common law and the arrest of Muslim Brotherhood supporters was not a path to democracy. And I ran through the US State Department's list of Egyptian arbitrary detentions, routine torture and unfair trials. I didn't see how the local constabulary could do much about condemnation from Mubarak's American friends. But it was purely a symbolic moment.

These cheerful, intelligent students wanted to see if they would hear the truth or get palmed off with another bromide about Egypt's steady march to democracy, its stability – versus the disaster of Iraq – and its supposedly roaring success. No one doubts that Mubarak's boys keep a close eye on his country's students.

But the questions I was asked after class told it all. Why didn't “we” leave Iraq? Are “we” going to attack Iran? Did “we” really believe in democracy in

These cheerful, intelligent students wanted to see if they would hear the truth or get palmed off with another bromide about Egypt's steady march to democracy, its stability – versus the disaster of Iraq – and its supposedly roaring success

FEAR AND LOATHING

If “we” left Iraq, she said in a quavering voice, the jihadists, the “terrorists”, could come here to America. They would attack us right here

the Middle East? In fact “our” shadow clearly hung over these young people.

Thirty hours later, I flicked on the television in my Valdosta, Georgia, hotel room and there was a bejewelled lady on Fox TV telling American viewers that if “we” left Iraq, the “jihadists” would come after us.

“They want a Caliphate that will take over the world,” she shrieked about a report that two children had deliberately been placed in an Iraqi car bomb which then exploded. She ranted on about how Muslim “jihadists” had been doing this “since the 1970s in Lebanon”.

It was tosh, of course. Children were never locked into car bombs in Beirut – and there weren’t any “jihadists” around in the Lebanese civil war of the 1970s. But fear had been sown. Now that the House of Representatives is talking about the US withdrawal by August 2008, fear seems to drip off the trees in America.

Looking for omens

Up in the town of Tiger, Georgia, Kathy Barnes is reported to be looking for omens as she fears for the life of her son, Captain Edward Berg of the 4th Brigade, US 3rd Infantry Division, off to Iraq for a second tour of duty, this time in George Bush’s infamous “surge”.

Last time he was there, Mrs Barnes saw a dead snake and took it as a bad sign. Then she saw two Canadian geese, soaring over the treetops. That was a good sign.

“A rational mind plays this game in war time,” as the Atlanta Journal-Constitution eloquently pointed out. “A

thunderclap becomes a herald, a bird’s song a prophecy.”

Dr Michael Noll’s students at Valdosta are as smart and bright-eyed as Dr El-Baradei’s in Cairo. They packed into the same lecture I had given in Egypt and seemed to share a lot of the same fears about Iraq. But a sullen seminar that same morning was a miserable affair in which a young woman seemed to break down in anger. If “we” left Iraq, she said in a quavering voice, the jihadists, the “terrorists”, could come here to America. They would attack us right here.

I sighed with frustration. I was listening to her voice but it was also the voice of the woman on Fox TV, the repeated, hopeless fantasy of Bush and Blair: that if we fail in Iraq, “they”, the monstrous enemy, will arrive on our shores.

Every day in the American papers now, I read the same “fear” transformed into irrationality. Luke Boggs – God, how I’d love that byline – announces in his local paper: “I say let the terrorists rot in Guantanamo. And let the Europeans ... howl. We are a serious nation, engaged in the serious business of trying to kill or capture the bad guys before they can do us more harm.” He calls Guantanamo’s inmates “hardcore jihadists”.

And I realise that the girl in Dr Noll’s seminar isn’t spouting this stuff about “jihadists” travelling from Iraq to America because she supports Bush. She is just frightened. She is genuinely afraid of all the “terror” warnings, the supposed “jihadists” threats, the red “terror” alerts and the purple alerts and

all the other colour-coded instruments of fear. She believes her president, and her president has done Osama bin Laden's job for him: he has crushed this young woman's spirit and courage.

But America is not at war. There are no electricity cuts on Valdosta's warm green campus, with its Spanish style department blocks and its narrow, beautiful church. There is no food rationing. There are no air-raid shelters or bombs or "jihadists" stalking these God-fearing folk. It is the US military that is at war, engaged in an Iraqi conflict that is doing damage of a far more subtle kind to America's social fabric.

Off campus, I meet a gentle, sensitive man, a Vietnam veteran with two doctor sons. One is a lieutenant colonel, an army medical officer heading back to Baghdad this week for Bush's "surge", bravely doing his duty in the face of

great danger. The other is a civilian doctor who hates the war. And now the two boys – divided by Iraq – can hardly bring themselves to speak to each other.

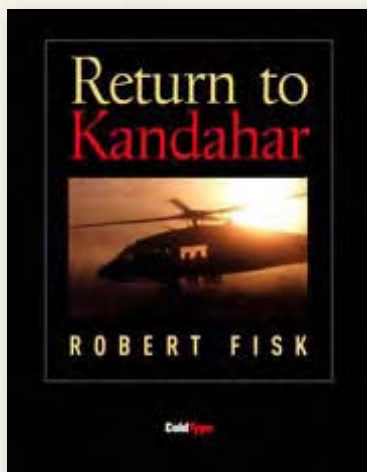
The soldier son called this week from his transit camp in Kuwait. "I think he is frightened," his father told me. A middle-aged lady asked me to sign a copy of my book, which she intends to send to her Marine Corps son in Baghdad. She palpably shakes with concern as she speaks of him. "Take the greatest care," I find myself writing on the flyleaf to her marine son. "And come safe home." **CT**

Robert Fisk's latest book is The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East.

This article was originally published in London's Independent newspaper

But America is not at war. There are no electricity cuts on Valdosta's warm green campus, with its Spanish style department blocks and its narrow, beautiful church

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DON'T FIRE ALBERTO GONZALEZ

BY GREG PALAST

Each of these bogus claims of voter fraud was attached to a sales pitch for a state law to tighten voter ID requirements – to prevent these ne'er-do-wells from voting twice

Before President Bush fired his sorry ass, US Attorney David Iglesias of New Mexico, in a last sad attempt to suck up to his Republican padrones, allowed his chief mouthpiece, Norm Cairns, to speak with me. He shouldn't have.

That was two years back, while I was investigating strange doings in New Mexico and Arizona, where, simultaneously, state legislators, Republicans all, claimed they had evidence of "voter fraud."

Psychiatrists call this kind of mutual delusional behavior folie a deux. I suspected something else: I smelled Karl Rove.

In the New Mexico legislature, a suburban Albuquerque political hackette, Justine Fox-Young (her real name), claimed to have "several" specific cases of vote identity rustling. Like Joe McCarthy waving his list of "Communists," she waived documents of "evidence" of illegal voting on the floor of the Legislature.

I called Ms. Fox-Young and asked her to send me the papers. The "evidence" never arrived. Maybe her fax machine was broken. I called Justine.

Q. Justine, you've uncovered criminals! Did you turn their names over to the US Attorney

A. Well, no, but someone did. Whose initials are Karl Rove?

She swore to me that US Attorney Iglesias would back up her story: he was investigating the evil voters and was about to indict them.

So I got Iglesias's guy Norm on the phone. Was Iglesias prosecuting, or actively investigating, one single real case of voter fraud? Norm went into a lengthy swirly-whirly river of diving, ducking bull-shit. I dove in.

Me: In other words, you can't back her story?

Norm: Well, yeah, uh, I guess you'd say that's true.

I guess I will say that, Norm. Fox-Young had just plain made it up; fibbed, lied, faked the evidence. There was a multi-state con in operation. But what was it? Each of these bogus claims of voter fraud was attached to a sales pitch for a state law to tighten voter ID requirements – to prevent these ne'er-do-wells from voting twice. In Arizona, one

crack-pot Republican legislator, the Hon. Russell Pearce, claimed he had evidence that five million Mexicans had illegally crossed the border to vote.

The point: Rove knew that a “challenge” operation by the Republican Party, run from his office, knocked out 300,000 voters – mainly poor ones, voters of color. His crew wanted to hike that higher.

The notable thing about this crime of voter identity theft is that it doesn’t happen. You are more likely to encounter ballot boxes that spontaneously combust. I found cases of voters struck by lightning – but out of 120 million votes cast, I couldn’t find a dozen criminal cases of a bandit stealing someone’s identity to vote.

Since the Republicans couldn’t find such criminals, they had to make them up. Force prosecutors to bring false charges against innocent voters (one did just that in Wisconsin) or at least claim they were hot on the trail of the fraudulent voters. Iglesias, though a Republican, wouldn’t bring bogus charges. And he wouldn’t lie about active investigations that didn’t exist except in Rove’s imagination.

That was his mistake.

Rove’s right-hand hit-man, Tim Griffin, added Iglesias to the hit list of prosecutors who were cut down on December 7, 2006. Griffin himself, after the December 7 firings, was appointed by Attorney General Gonzales, at Rove’s personal request, to one of the newly-vacated slots as US Attorney for Arkansas. The sleeper cell of Rove-bot US attorneys is now in place to bless voter suppression games in 2008.

I’ve previously reported for BBC that Griffin was the Man in the Memos who directed the massive, wrongful purge of African-American soldiers in 2004 – the ‘caging’ list scam. Based on that expose, voting rights lawyer Robert F. Kennedy Jr., said, “Griffin and Rove should be in jail, not in office.”

That, too is another story – but the important thing to pick up here is:

1. It’s all about the 2008 election.
2. It’s not about Gonzales.

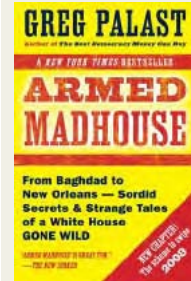
We’ve been here before. Gonzales is getting Libby’d. Takes the bullet for Karl Rove and the White House. If you wondered why the Republican jackals like the sinister Senator Specter piled on Gonzales – it’s because they were told to.

These guys learned from Richard Nixon. In 1973, when Nixon was getting hammered over Watergate, he threw the Senate Committee his Attorney General, a schmuck named Kleindeist. Famously, Nixon’s own Rove, a devious creep named John Erlichman, told Nixon to leave the Attorney General, “twisting slowly in the wind.”

Rove and Bush are doing the Nixon Twist on Gonzales.

Look, I have no sympathy for Alberto the Doomed. He’s guilty of a crime I employed in racketeering cases: “Willful failure to know.” It’s a kind of fraud; Alberto was going way out of his way to not know what he had to know, that Rove and the President were toying with prosecutors.

Gonzales is their glove-puppet. Why fire him? The nation watches these hearings and wants to kill something. But why shoot the puppet? It’s time to fire the puppeteer. Eh, Mr. Rove? **CT**



This excerpt is based on “The Theft of 2008,” from the new, expanded edition of Armed Madhouse: From New Orleans to Baghdad – Sordid Secrets and Strange Tales of a White House Gone Wild, recently released by Penguin.

Order the book from gregpalast.com

ERASING HISTORY

BY FELICITY ARBUTHNOT

Before the invasion it was unthinkable to even wonder whether a host, driver, shopkeeper was of a particular religion, sect. They were Iraqis, intermarried, living mostly side by side

Who is erasing Iraq's history? A visitor only has to be in the country minutes before someone informs them: "We are the cradle of civilization", and launches in to the pride and passion of historical jewels and archeological wonders stretching back seemingly beyond time. They are not Sunni, Shia, Christian, Turkoman, Yazidi jewels; they are Mesopotamia's and have been proudly nurtured since the mists of time.

Samarra's great golden domes, destroyed on 22nd February last year, a Shia shrine in a largely Sunni city, had been tended and protected by residents for centuries. The southern holy cities of Najav and Kerbala were places where Iraqis of all or no religion, demanded to take visitors.

Before the invasion it was unthinkable to even wonder whether a host, driver, shopkeeper was of a particular religion, sect. They were Iraqis, intermarried, living mostly side by side. From the day all Iraq was reduced to an intensive care unit (9th April 2003)

"mission accomplished", patient critical, suddenly there were "Sunni", "Shia", "tribes", in the US and UK lexicon. They were a people "unable yet to take responsibility for their country" (which they had managed pretty imaginatively even under the 13 years of crippling sanctions, which will forever be former weak-willed UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's murderous legacy for not being able to stand up to US/UK pressure.)

So having presented a divided, backward nation to the world, why not show them as such – and "divide and rule" and sew doubt where none had existed and demolish all that is cohesive: history itself?

A bit of modern – by Iraq standards – history destroyed this week is the Al Sarafiya Bridge, built by the British in another Mesopotamian adventure, in the early 1900's. Unlike many of Iraq's wondrous bridges spanning the Tigris and the Euphrates, it survived the 1991 carpet bombing, but not now the invasion. While accounts differ, a truck bomb (and there are plenty of reports

of trucks, vans, cars being stopped the allied troops and their owners later finding bombs in them) one eyewitness, Farhan Sudani, states he saw a missile dropped from a US helicopter.

“It is one of Baghdad’s monuments. We are losing a lot of our history every day”, Ahmed Adul-Karim, who lives nearby is quoted as saying.

“It is one of our famous monuments, linked to Baghdad’s modern history”, said architect Haider Ghazala.

Iraq’s bridges are its very arteries, they feed the country’s heart and extremities. When they were bombed in 1991, almost all were rebuilt with extraordinary ingenuity, in spite of the embargo on materials. The Fourteenth of July Bridge, named to commemorate the 1958 revolution against the British (who had opened the doors for monopolies to plunder the oil wealth) was the last to be rebuilt. Iraqis had watched the complexities with baited breath, many thinking it could not be done. When it was, they flocked to Baghdad, from throughout the country, many lying on it to kiss the concrete.

Ruinbed by troops

The Roman processional and most of Babylon has been ruined by US and Polish troops, archeological barbarians, as Ur, believed birthplace of Abraham. And who has the courage to travel in “liberated” Iraq, to make an inventory of the destruction of the thousands of Iraq’s other ochre and golden historical gems?

Today it is Kerbala, site of one of the two most revered Shia shrines, resting place of Imam Hussein Bin Ali and his

brother Abbas who left their mark on Islamic history at the Battle of Tuff (622), Imam Hussein mercilessly slaughtered, who is believed to have died with a Koran in one hand and a sword in the other.

His words: “Death with dignity is better than a life of humiliation”, have not only a deep resonance with his Shia followers, but throughout Iraq. Or indeed, would strike resonance with any invaded nation. As I write they will be gathering the body parts.

Before the invasion, suicide bombings were unheard of in Iraq. The 1990’s had some car bombs in Baghdad, which bewildered Iraqis and it would seem were generated by former US darling Iyad Allawi’s Iraq National Accord. American spokespersons have a mantra: “Al Qaeda”.

But there was no Al Qaeda (anyway a CIA creation) in Iraq before the invasion. Has the most powerful army on earth no ability to control Iraq’s borders? Saddam Hussein never had a problem. Anyway, the US military itself has stated that only a minimal percentage of attacks are by foreign fighters and Iraqis have lived together for centuries.

When a friend – and many others – said, just prior to the invasion: “Let them come, we have been fighting invaders for centuries”, she was talking about just that. Not Iraqis fighting Iraqis.

Would Sunnis attack Kerbala? During the siege of Falluja the people of Najav and Kerbala travelled the perilous route north west, to take trucks of food, goods and medicines. Would they

Who has the courage to travel in “liberated” Iraq, to make an inventory of the destruction of the thousands of Iraq’s other ochre and golden historical gems?

CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS

It also happens to be a Zionist trait to destroy the ancient, the beautiful, the very historic soul of a nation and people

repay with this, or is there an enemy within, closer to the occupiers?

“Even in the Iran-Iraq war, our archeological sites, our history and theirs were respected, said a near tearful archeologist in 1991, referring to the indiscriminate destruction from the air of humanity’s history and utter disregard for civilian life, throwing to the winds, then as now, every international convention and treaty on the rules of war.

It also happens to be a Zionist trait to destroy the ancient, the beautiful, the very historic soul of a nation and people, America's indivisible ally. Israeli Defence Force personnel and others, certainly came in with the US and British troops. Who else did?

And remember the bomb which went off under a bridge in Iran’s neighbouring province to Basra? “This bomb has a British accent”, said an Iranian government spokesman. Maybe or may be not, but “stuff happens”, throughout the region – to quote Rumsfeld after the invasion's looting and decimation – that was not happening before 9th April 2003.

British Forces (some of whom were caught in Arab dress with a carload of explosives last year, who were arrested and for whom the British demolished a

police station to rescue) are due to hand over Kerbala to Iraqis later this month. They had to hand it back after invading it in 1915, too.

Over Easter, the British and the Czech invaders in southern Iraq had a competition involving pulling fire engines to raise money for charity (the Czechs won) and raised £2,000 sterling. The charity was for their fellow injured service personnel in one of the richest countries on earth, the UK. Not for the maimed parents and children of southern Iraq, for whose injuries they are responsible.

It would be good to think they are winging their way up to Kerbala to donate it to the decimated as a parting gift and rushing the sort of aid that Najav and Kerbala, despite poverty and deprivation, did to Falluja. But no breath holding. And WHO IS erasing Iraq’s history?

Felicity Arbuthnot is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She has written and broadcast on Iraq, and was also senior researcher for John Pilger’s award-winning documentary, Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq.

CT

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THE BED OF SODOM

BY URI AVNERY

In Hebrew legend, the bed of Sodom is a symbol of evil. The Bible tells how God decided to obliterate Sodom because of the wickedness of its people (Genesis, 18). The legend gives us an example of this wickedness: the special bed for visitors. When a stranger came to Sodom, he was put in this bed. If he was too tall, his legs were shortened. If he was too short, his limbs were stretched to fit.

In political life, there is more than one bed like this. On the Right and on the Left, there are people who put every problem in such a bed, cut off limbs and stretch limbs, until reality matches theory.

From the sixties on, doctrinaire leftists tended to put every situation into the bed of Vietnam. Everything – be it the murderous tyranny in Chile or the American threats against Cuba – had to fit the Vietnam example. Applying this model, it was easy to decide who were the good guys and who the bad, what to do and how to solve the problem.

That was convenient. It is much eas-

ier to draw conclusions when there is no need to consider the complexities of a particular conflict, its historical background and its local circumstances.

Lately, a new bed of sodom has gained currency: South Africa. In some circles of the radical left there is a tendency to force every conflict into this bed. Every new case of evil and oppression in the world is seen as a new version of the apartheid regime, and it is decided accordingly how to solve the problem and what to do to achieve the desired end.

True, the South African situation arose in particular historical circumstances that took centuries to mature. It was not identical with the problem of the aborigines in Australia or the settlement of the Whites in North America, nor to Northern Ireland or the situation in Iraq. But it is certainly convenient to give one and the same answer to all problems.

Of course, there is always a superficial similarity between different regimes of oppression. But if one is not ready to see the differences between

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the diseases, one is liable to prescribe false medicines – and risk killing the patient in the process.

Now this is happening here.

It is easy to put the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the South African bed, since the similarities between the symptoms are obvious. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories has been going on for 40 years now, and almost 60 years have passed since the Naqba – the armed conflict of 1948 in which the State of Israel came into being and in which more than half the Palestinians lost their homes and land. Relations between the settlers and the Palestinians are in many ways reminiscent of apartheid; and even in Israel proper, the Arab citizens are far from real equality.

What to do? One has to learn from South Africa that there is nothing to be gained from appealing to the conscience of the ruling people. Among the white minority in South Africa, there was no real difference between Left and Right, between open racists and liberals, who were but better disguised racists, with the exception of a few white heroes who joined the fight for freedom.

Therefore, redemption could only come from the outside. And indeed, world public opinion saw the injustice of apartheid and imposed a worldwide boycott on South Africa, till in the end the white minority capitulated. Power in the united South African state passed into the hands of the black majority, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and became president, and all this took place – wonder of wonders

– without bloodshed.

If this happened in South Africa, the proponents of this view say, it must happen here, too. The idea of establishing a Palestinian state next to the State of Israel (the “Two-State Solution”) must be discarded, and the single state between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River (the “One-State Solution”) must become the aim. This must be achieved by the ultimate weapon which proved itself in South Africa: boycott.

This is how it is going to happen: justice-lovers throughout the world will convince world public opinion to impose a general boycott on the State of Israel. The state will collapse and disintegrate. Between the sea and the river there will come into being one single state, in which Israelis and Palestinians will live peacefully together, as equal citizens. The settlers can stay where they are, there will be no problem of borders, and all that remains is to decide who will be the Palestinian Mandela.

No change from the inside?

I listened to a lecture by Professor Ilan Pappé of Haifa University, one of the leading spokesmen for this idea. The audience consisted of Palestinian, Israeli and international activists in Bil'in, the village that has become a symbol of resistance to the occupation. He presented a well-structured set of ideas, expressed with eloquence and enthusiasm. These were the principles:

There is no sense in opposing just the occupation, nor any other particular policy of the Israeli government. The

problem is the very essence of Israel as a Zionist state. This essence is unchangeable as long as the state exists. No change from the inside is possible, because in Israel there is no essential difference between Right and Left. Both are accomplices in a policy whose real aim is ethnic cleansing, the expulsion of the Palestinians not only from the occupied territories, but also from Israel proper.

Therefore, everyone who strives for a just solution must aim at the establishment of a single state, to which the refugees of 1948 and 1967 will be invited to return. This will be a joint and egalitarian state, like today's South Africa.

There is no sense in trying to change Israel from the inside. Salvation will come from the outside: a world-wide boycott of Israel, which will cause the state to collapse and convince the Israeli public that there is no escape from the One-State Solution.

It sounded logical and convincing, and the speaker did indeed gain applause.

This theoretical structure contains several assumptions with which I have no quarrel. The Zionist Left has indeed collapsed in the last few years, and its absence from the field of struggle is a painful and dangerous fact. In today's Knesset, there is no effective Zionist party that is seriously fighting for real equality for the Arab citizens. Nobody is able today to call out into the street hundreds of thousands, or even tens of thousands, in order to pressure the government to accept the peace proposal of the whole Arab world.

There is no doubt that the real dis-

ease is not the 40-year long occupation. The occupation is a symptom of a more profound disease, which is connected with the official ideology of the state. The aim of ethnic cleansing and the establishment of a Jewish State from the sea to the river is dear to the hearts of many Israelis, and perhaps Rabbi Meir Kahane was right when he asserted that this is everybody's unspoken desire.

Change: the real battlefield

But unlike professor Pappé, I am convinced that it is possible to change the historical direction of Israel. I am convinced that this is the real battlefield for the Israeli peace forces, and I myself have been engaged in it for decades.

Moreover, I believe that we have already attained impressive achievements: the recognition of the existence of the Palestinian people has become general, and so has the readiness of most Israelis to accept the idea of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

We have compelled our government to recognize the PLO, and we shall compel them to recognize Hamas. True, all this would not have happened without the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and (sometimes) favorable international circumstances, but the contribution of the Israeli peace forces, which pioneered these ideas, was significant.

Also, the notion has lately gained acceptance in Israel and other countries, that peace will be achieved only if we succeed in overcoming the gap between the Israeli and the Palestinian

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A boycott of the "Jewish State", which is identified with the victims of the Nazis, just will not happen. It will be enough to remind people that the long road to the gas chambers started with the 1933 Nazi slogan "Kauft nicht bei Juden" ("Don't buy from Jews")

narratives and in integrating them into one single historical account, which will recognize the injustices which have been committed and which are still going on. Nothing is more important. (Our path-breaking booklet "Truth Against Truth" was the beginning of this process.)

On the surface, it appears that we have failed. We have not succeeded in compelling our government to stop the building of the wall or the enlargement of the settlements, nor to restore to the Palestinians their freedom of movement. In short, we have not succeeded in putting an end to the occupation. The Arab citizens of Israel have not attained real equality. But beneath the surface, in the depths of national consciousness, we are succeeding. The question is how to turn the hidden success into an open political fact. In other words: how to change the policy of the Israeli government.

The idea of the "One-State Solution" will harm this effort very much.

It diverts the effort from a solution that has now, after many years, a broad public basis, in favor of a solution that has no chance at all.

There is no doubt that 99.99% of Jewish Israelis want the State of Israel to exist as a state with a robust Jewish majority, whatever its borders.

The belief that a world-wide boycott could change this is a complete illusion. Immediately after his lecture, my colleague Adam Keller asked the professor a simple question: "The entire world has imposed a blockade on the Palestinian people. But in spite of the terrible misery of the Palestinians, they

have not been brought to their knees. Why do you think that a boycott would break the Israeli public, which is far stronger economically, so that they would give up the Jewish character of the state?" (There was no answer.)

Boycott impossible

In any case, such a boycott is quite impossible. Here and there, an organization can declare a boycott, small circles of justice-lovers can keep it, but there is no chance that in the coming decades a world-wide boycott movement, like the one that broke the racist regime in South Africa, will come about. That regime was headed by declared admirers of the Nazis. A boycott of the "Jewish State", which is identified with the victims of the Nazis, just will not happen. It will be enough to remind people that the long road to the gas chambers started with the 1933 Nazi slogan "Kauft nicht bei Juden" ("Don't buy from Jews").

(The obnoxious fact that the government of the "State of the Holocaust Survivors" had close relations with the Apartheid State does not change this situation.)

That is the problem with the bed of Sodom: one size does not fit all. When the circumstances are different, the remedies must be different, too.

The idea of the "One-State Solution" can attract people who despair of the struggle for the soul of Israel. I do understand them. But it is a dangerous idea, especially for the Palestinians.

Statistically, the Israeli Jews constitute, as of now, the absolute majority between the sea and the river. To that,

one must add an even more important fact: the average annual income of an Arab Palestinian is about 800 dollars, that of a Jewish Israeli is about 20,000 dollars – 25 times (!) higher. The Israeli economy is growing every year. The Palestinians would be “hewers of wood and drawers of water”. That means that if the imaginary joint state did indeed come into being, the Jews there would wield in it absolute power. They would, of course, use this power to consolidate their dominance and prevent the return of refugees.

Thus the South African example could come true retroactively: in the Single State, an apartheid-like regime would indeed come into being. Not only would the Israeli-Palestinian conflict not be solved, but on the contrary, it would move into an even more dangerous phase.

Pappe put forward an argument that looked a bit strange to me: that a Single State already exists in practice, since Israel rules from the sea to the river. But that is not so. There is no single state, neither formally nor in practice, but one state occupying another. Such a state, in which a dominant nation controls the others, will eventually disintegrate – as did the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

The One State will not come into being. Not only the Israelis, but most of the Palestinians, too, will not give up their right to a national state of their own. They can applaud an Israeli professor who advocates the dismantling of the State of Israel, but they have no time to wait for utopian solutions that could be realized in a hundred years.

They need an end to the occupation and to achieve a solution to the conflict here and now, in the near future.

All who wholeheartedly want to help the occupied Palestinian people would be well advised to keep well away from the idea of a general boycott of Israel. It would push all Israelis into the arms of the extreme Right, because it would reinforce the right-wing belief that “All the world is against us” – a belief that took root in the years of the Holocaust, when “all the world looked on and kept silent”. Every Israeli child learns this in school.

Isolating the peace activists

A focused boycott against specific organizations and corporations that actively contribute to the occupation can indeed help in convincing the Israeli public that the occupation is not worthwhile. Such a boycott can achieve a specific aim – if it is not aimed at the collapse of the State of Israel. Gush Shalom, to which I belong, has for 10 years been organizing a boycott of the products of the settlements. The aim is to isolate the settlers and their accomplices. But a general boycott on the State of Israel would achieve the very opposite – to isolate the Israeli peace activists.

The “Two-State Solution” was and still is the only solution. When we put it forward immediately after the 1948 war, we could be counted on the fingers of two hands not only in Israel but in the entire world. Now there exists a world-wide consensus about it. The path to this solution is not smooth, many dangers lurk on the way, but it is

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A NEW ISRAEL

All public opinion polls show that the great majority of Israelis not only want peace, but are ready to pay its price. But they are afraid

a realistic solution that can be achieved.

One can say: OK, we will accept the Two-State Solution because it is realistic, but after its realization we shall endeavor to abolish the two states and establish one joint state. That is alright with me. As for myself, I hope that in the course of time a federation of the two states will come into being, and relations between the two will become close. I also hope that a regional union, like the EU, will be established, consisting of all the Arab states and Israel, and perhaps also Turkey and Iran.

But first of all we must treat the wound from which we are all suffering: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Not by patent medicines, certainly not by a bed of Sodom, but with the medicines that are on the shelf.

The 18th Chapter of Genesis tells of Abraham trying to convince the Almighty not to obliterate Sodom.

“Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?”

God promised him not to destroy the town if there were 50 righteous in it. Abraham haggled and brought the Almighty down to 45, then 40, 30 and 20, finally settling for 10. But in Sodom there were no 10 righteous to be found, and so its fate was sealed.

I believe that in Israel there are many, many more than ten righteous people. All public opinion polls show that the great majority of Israelis not only want peace, but are ready to pay its price. But they are afraid. They lack trust. They are shackled by the beliefs they acquired in early childhood. They must be freed from them – and I believe that it can be done.

Uri Avneri is an Irgun veteran turned Israeli peace activist



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THE ZUCCHINI PROSECUTION

BY MIKE WHITNEY

The case against Jose Padilla would be funny if a man's life hadn't been ruined in the process – but it has. The Bush administration has leapt from one absurd accusation to the next completely undisturbed by the glaring inconsistencies of their case. The prosecution's objective is the same now as it was five years ago when the Chicago gang-banger was first arrested at O'Hare Airport as an alleged “dirty bomber”, that is, keep Padilla behind bars for the rest of his life.

The government has no case against Padilla and they know it. He's merely a lab-rat in their experiment to expand presidential powers.

The Washington Post even admitted this in an article at the end of April, “Few Specifics Evident as Padilla Trial Nears” 4-23-07. Padilla had no nuclear material, no plan to attack apartment buildings, and no part in any terrorist conspiracy. It's all baloney. In five years, the government hasn't produced a shred of evidence that Padilla is guilty of anything.

Nothing – zip! In fact, according to the Washington Post, the government's case “lacks anything about the defendant being involved in ANY particular plot in the United States OR ANYWHERE ELSE”.

So, why has this travesty been allowed to continue for so long?

Padilla has been in solitary confinement for the last five years. During that time he was drugged, humiliated, and tortured – all of the practices which have become commonplace under Bush. For the first four years he was deprived of habeas corpus and legal counsel. During that period, he was never charged with a crime. He was simply declared an “enemy combatant” and stripped of his rights. His arrest has been used to establish the precedent that Bush can arbitrarily imprison American citizens without filing charges. It is the very definition of tyranny.

But this is old news. What's new is that the media's coverage of Padilla has grown strangely sympathetic. The Washington Post, which has been one

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of the strongest backers of Bush's foreign adventurism, has been considerably less supportive of his attack on civil liberties. The Post criticized the weakness of the government's case and the woeful lack of evidence connecting Padilla to a crime. The prosecution even admits that the charges are "hard to particularize" and that the defendant cannot be "linked to a particular violent act or terrorist group." This explains the skepticism of U.S. District Judge Marcia G. Cooke who said (with some irony) that the indictment "is very light on facts".

Nevertheless, the Padilla case is going forward even though there is no evidence of a crime – just the possibility that Padilla might do something illegal in the future. The parallels to Franz Kafka's "The Trial" have not been lost on Padilla's defense team who characterized the government's case as "the ethereal nature of an alleged conspiracy."

By "ethereal" we assume they mean hogwash.

The Post does a good job of exposing the flaws in the prosecution's case, but stops short of saying the charges are baseless and without merit. They know what Bush and his legal team are up to and what extraordinary steps they will take to reach their goal. They are trying to convict a man (and possibly send him to his death) without producing any witnesses or evidence of a crime. If they succeed, Bush will be able to ignore the law and arrest whomever he chooses. That doesn't mean the outcome of the trial is certain. Far from it. In fact, it'll be hard to prove Padilla's

guilt with nothing but conjecture and demagoguery.

Presently, the government is charging Padilla as a material witness in a "conspiracy to murder, kidnap and maim". But they have no proof.

They say that he is part of a "North American support cell that's part of a vast international movement of foot soldiers, recruiters and financiers who foment violent jihad around the globe."

Again, there is no of this.

They say that he signed a "mujahideen data form"; an "application form that was recovered from a reputed Al Qaida base."

Even if Padilla did sign this silly-sounding jihad application, (which is still in doubt) that's guilt by association – it doesn't prove that he was involved in the commission of a crime.

The prosecution's case depends on convincing jurors that Padilla was secretly preparing Al Qaida forces for another terrorist attack. They have submitted wiretapped phone conversations which (they believe) implicate him in a conspiracy. But do they? The conversations prove nothing. In fact, they're ridiculous. They are merely recordings of Padilla with some unknown person talking in code about spending "\$3500 to buy zucchini".

"Zucchini"?

Is that it? Is that the government's case? Is it really worth keeping a man behind bars for 5 years and driving him mad because he talks about zucchini on the phone?

What about rhubarb?

Even the Post cannot relay the details of the "The Zucchini Prosecution"

without a hint of derision. The Post's reporter, Peter Whoriskey, mockingly notes that while the government's case is short on "violent specifics"; it is "rich in atmospherics."

Indeed. The entire case appears to be built on "atmospherics" rather than facts. The prosecution has no more evidence now than they did when they began this witch-hunt. Federal Prosecutor Brian Frazier admitted as much when he was asked about the vague nature of the charges.

Frazier said they were "hard to particularize" and that they revolve around an "inchoate crime...rather than any completed operation".

"Inchoate"?

So, Frazier is admitting that the alleged crime was still in its embryonic stages? That it hadn't yet been committed!?!

Get this: Jose Padilla just spent five years in solitary confinement for a crime, which the government now admits, never took place.

The notion that a man can be imprisoned without proof of a crime is "preemptive justice", which is no justice at all. It denies the "presumption of innocence" and cedes absolute power to the state.

The court needs to put an end to this nonsense and dismiss the case for lack of evidence. This fiasco has gone on long enough. No one should be caged like an animal for half a decade for talking about zucchini on the phone.

Padilla should be released.

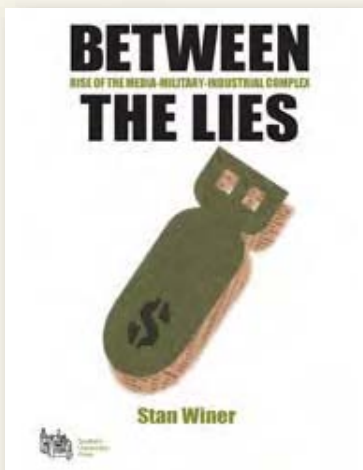
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