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Mirror, Mirror, On The Wall ...

Neil Clark shows how British Prime Minister Theresa May's paranoid claims about Russian dirty tricks can be more accurately applied to the UK and its closest ally

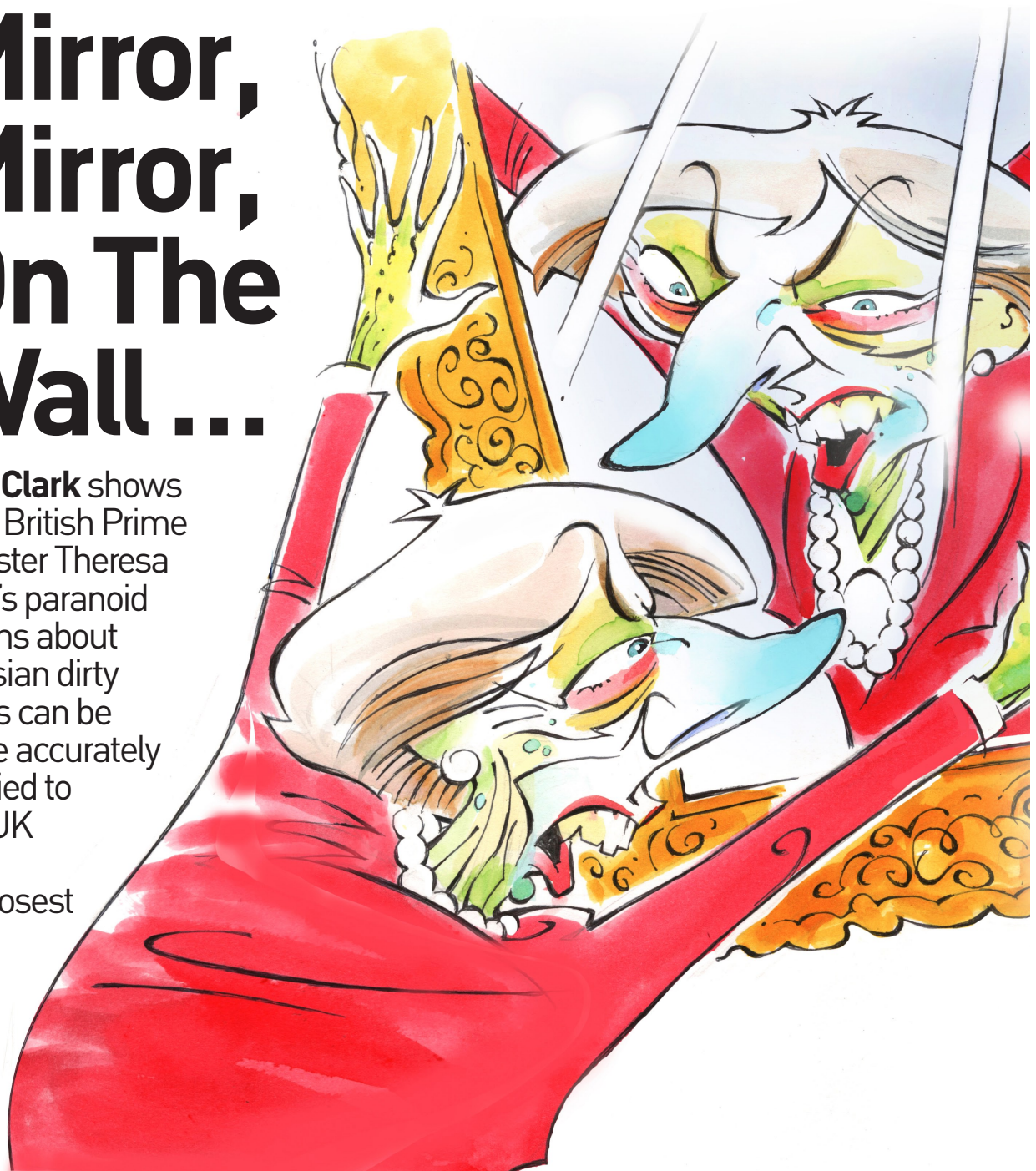
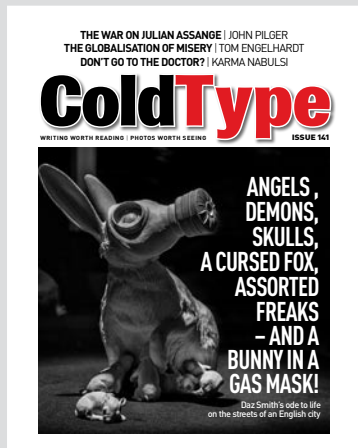
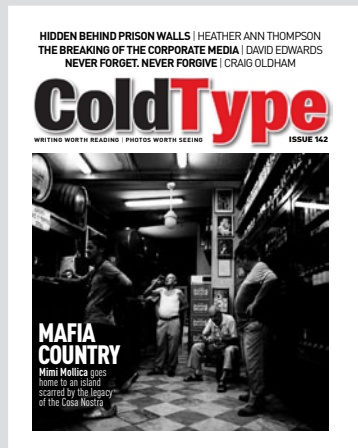


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Edward Grazda

Down and out in New York City

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Same Again?

Back into the Afghan abyss

Alfred W. McCoy tells how a failed drug war will defeat Trump's Afghan adventure

After 16 years of continuous war in that country, the obvious question is: Does this new campaign have any realistic chance of success, no less victory?

After nine months of confusion, chaos, and cascading tweets, Donald Trump's White House has finally made one thing crystal clear: the US is staying in Afghanistan to fight and – so they insist – win. “The killers need to know they have nowhere to hide, that no place is beyond the reach of American might,” said the president in August, trumpeting his virtual declaration of war on the Taliban. Overturning Barack Obama's planned (and stalled) drawdown in Afghanistan, Secretary of Defense James Mattis announced that the Pentagon would send 4,000 more soldiers to fight there, bringing American troop strength to nearly 15,000.

In October, as that new mini-escalation was ramping up, the CIA leaked to the New York Times news of a complementary covert surge with lethal drone strikes and “highly experienced” Agency paramilitary teams being dispatched to “hunt and kill” Taliban guerrillas, both ordinary fighters and top officials. “This is unforgiving, relentless,” intoned CIA Director Mike Pompeo, promising a wave of extrajudicial killings reminiscent of the Agency's notorious Phoenix Program during the Vietnam War. CIA paramilitary officers, reported the Times, will lead Special Forces operatives, both Afghan and American, in expanded counterterrorism operations that, in the past, “have been accused of indiscriminately killing Afghan

civilians.” In short, it's game on in Afghanistan.

After 16 years of continuous war in that country, the obvious question is: Does this new campaign have any realistic chance of success, no less victory? To answer that, another question must be asked: How has the Taliban managed to expand in recent years despite intensive US operations and a massive air campaign, as well as the endless and endlessly expensive training of Afghan security forces? After all, the Afghan War is not only the longest in US history, but also one of the largest, peaking at 101,000 American troops in country during President Obama's surge of 2010-2011.

Thinking about the Taliban

Americans have been hearing about the Taliban for so long that most fail to appreciate just how relentless that movement's growth has been in recent years. In the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, the Bush White House unleashed a lethal combination of US airpower and CIA-funded Afghan warlords to crush the fundamentalist Taliban and capture the Afghan capital, Kabul, with stunning speed. Not only was that Islamist movement and its government defeated, but it lost so many dedicated militants to those devastating air attacks that it was seemingly smashed beyond repair or revival. Nonetheless, within five years, the Taliban was back



US soldiers in Afghanistan. Photo: YouTube.com

in force, already fielding 25,000 fighters. By 2015, it was in control of more than half the countryside, had captured district capitals, and was even pounding at the gates of major provincial cities such as Kunduz.

As with any movement, there are multiple reasons for the Taliban's success, including the failure of the government in Kabul – a cesspit of corruption – to deliver anything like rural prosperity, the country's martial tradition of fighting foreign occupiers, and Pakistan's sub-rosa support, as well as the wide-open sanctuaries in its tribal backlands along the Afghan border. But there is one other factor, more fundamental than all the rest: the opium poppy.

The Taliban guerrillas are, like many insurgent armies, largely made up of teenagers who fight, at least in part, for cash to feed their families. Every spring for the past 15 years, as snow melts from mountain slopes across that country, new crops of such teenage recruits emerge from impoverished villages ready to take up arms for the rebel cause. Each of them reportedly makes at least \$300 a month, far more than

they could possibly hope to earn from the usual agricultural wages. In other words, it takes an estimated \$90-million in salaries alone for the Taliban to field its 25,000 strong guerrilla army for a single fighting season. With an overall budget approaching a billion dollars annually, the cost of the insurgency's 15-year war rings in at something close to \$15-billion.

So where, in that impoverished, arid land, has the Taliban been getting nearly a billion dollars a year? According to General John Nicholson, the US commander in Afghanistan, a single Afghan province, Helmand, “produces a significant amount of the opium globally that turns into heroin and . . . provides about 60 percent of the Taliban funding.” The country's president, Ashraf Ghani, a former World Bank official, agrees. “Without drugs,” he's said, “this war would have been long over. The heroin is a very important driver of this war.”

The Taliban's rise has paralleled the relentless growth of Afghanistan's opium production from a mere 185 tons when the US invaded in October 2001 to a still-unequaled

The Taliban guerrillas are, like many insurgent armies, largely made up of teenagers who fight, at least in part, for cash to feed their families. Every spring for the past 15 years, as snow melts from mountain slopes across that country, new crops of such teenage recruits emerge from impoverished villages ready to take up arms for the rebel cause

Consolidating Power

Despite the expenditure of nearly \$9-billion on its counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan, Washington has presided over what Sopko calls a “dramatic expansion of opium poppy cultivation from less than 8,000 hectares grown in 2001 to 200,000 hectares in 2016”

yield of 8,200 tons in 2008, a harvest that provided an unprecedented 53 percent of the country’s gross domestic product and 93 percent of the world’s illicit heroin supply. That same year, the UN stated that Taliban guerrillas were extracting “from the drug economy resources for arms, logistics, and militia pay.” A study for the US Institute of Peace also found that, in 2009, the Taliban already had 50 heroin labs in its territory and controlled 98 percent of the country’s poppy fields, collecting \$425-million in “taxes” levied on the opium traffic.

By the time Obama’s 2010 surge segued into an exit strategy four years later, observers were unanimous in their assessment that opium had become central to the Taliban’s survival. Despite a succession of “drug eradication” programmes sponsored and funded by Washington, the Pentagon’s Special Inspector for Afghanistan Reconstruction, John Sopko, concluded in 2014 that, “by every conceivable metric, we’ve failed. Production and cultivation are up, interdiction and eradication are down, financial support to the insurgency is up, and addiction and abuse are at unprecedented levels in Afghanistan.”

The 2013 opium crop covered a record area of 209,000 hectares, bringing the harvest back up to a substantial 5,500 tons. This massive crop generated some \$3-billion in illicit income, of which the Taliban’s tax alone took an estimated \$320-million – almost half that movement’s revenues. The US Embassy corroborated this dismal assessment, calling the illicit income “a windfall for the insurgency, which profits from the drug trade at almost every level.”

The failure of anti-narcotics efforts

As 2017 ends, with the White House poised for another four-year plunge into the Afghan abyss, has anything changed that might weaken the Taliban and so spare Washington from a defeat foretold? To answer this question, John Sopko has been armed with a Congressional mandate to probe all

forms of failure there and already has five years of experience in this difficult mission. Recently, he drafted a scathing review of Washington’s failed 15-year effort to reduce Afghan opium production and thereby defeat the Taliban. This 150-page draft report, *Counter-narcotics: Lessons from Afghanistan, 2002-2016*, depicts a drug-policy disaster only likely to ensure an ever-increasing income for the Taliban to fight an endless war. When read in tandem with the UN’s annual opium surveys, Sopko provides ample evidence that Trump’s decision to double down in that country is almost certainly doomed to failure.

Over the past 15 years, all counter-narcotics efforts by the US, Great Britain, and the UN have failed to slow the country’s drug production. “Opium remains the country’s most valuable cash crop,” says Sopko, “worth around \$3-billion per year at border prices.” It provides, he adds, “up to 411,000 full time equivalent jobs, more than the number of people employed by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces.”

Despite the expenditure of nearly \$9-billion on its counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan, Washington has presided over what Sopko calls a “dramatic expansion of opium poppy cultivation from less than 8,000 hectares grown in 2001 to 200,000 hectares in 2016.” By then, the opium crop represented more than two-thirds of the country’s agricultural output. Meanwhile, 11 percent of the population is now estimated to be using illicit drugs, one of the world’s highest addiction rates.

The UN’s crop survey for 2016, compiled by hundreds of Afghan enumerators who regularly walked through the poppy fields – and corroborated by sophisticated satellite imagery – adds yet more sombre strokes to this picture. That year, at 5,600 tons the opium harvest was again up substantially (by 43 percent). In the same period, opium eradication efforts fell by 91 percent to a mere 355 hectares of the crop destroyed, or less than two percent of all illegal poppy

fields in the country.

Since the start of its intervention in 2001, Washington and its drug war allies have tried every possible counter-narcotics option. All, without exception, have failed. The bulk of the US budget (\$4.3-billion) was allocated to interdiction efforts, but ample funds were left for more experimental approaches, none of which seem to have worked.

As much as Washington's drug policies failed, the UN efforts were, in Inspector Sopko's view, even less effective. During the first decade following its 2001 invasion, Washington was obsessed with counterterrorism operations and so outsourced the drug war to others. It delegated opium suppression to the British and police training for interdiction to the Germans. In this critical period, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) manoeuvred to fill the leadership void.

In what was then seen as a clever political gambit, the UN argued, according to Sopko's report, that "it was necessary to destroy 25 percent of the standing poppy crop each year in order to deter future planting," in the process justifying the employment of thousands of Afghan peasants to pull up poppy plants. Defending that crop suppression program, Antonio Maria Costa, the Soviet-trained Italian economist who then headed UNODC, declared, according to Sopko, "that there was no relationship between poppy cultivation and poverty." From his high modernist headquarters in Vienna, Costa pledged "to reduce poppy cultivation by 70 percent in five years and eliminate the crop altogether in ten years" – a claim that soon proved laughable.

Near the start of Washington's Afghan adventure in 2002, the US military, the CIA, and the country's American-supported president, Hamid Karzai, had little interest in or next to no knowledge of the drug problem. Other actors with far less power – the US embassy in Kabul, the US Drug Enforcement Agency, the World Bank, and the European Commission, among others – all made periodic forays into anti-narcotics

work. Funds for such operations ebbed and flowed, while new initiatives were regularly launched without significant analysis of or thought about past policies.

In this chaotic process, as Sopko points out, "interdiction efforts failed to fundamentally alter or impact the Afghan drug trade in a meaningful way. In 2017, poppy cultivation and opium production seemed destined to reach a record high and the Taliban continued to derive funding from the drug trade."

A short-lived military solution

Amid this succession of policy failures, only one program, in Sopko's view, had a discernible impact on drug production: the launching of a massive occupation of the country's key southern opium districts by the US military and the Afghans they were training. Checkpoints were set up at almost every road crossing. "In Marjah," he reports, "located in the opium poppy heartland of Helmand Province, the share of agricultural land dedicated to poppy was almost 60 percent prior to the major influx of US and Afghan forces. After Operation Moshtarak, in which 15,000 US Marines and the ANDSF [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces] occupied the district in February 2010, the amount of land dedicated to poppy fell to less than five percent." By the end of that year, 20,000 leathernecks in 50 fortified bases, backed by 10,000 British troops, had temporarily wrested control of the province from the Taliban guerrillas and checked the opium traffic that had sustained them.

Apart from their omnipresent checkpoints, the Marines also introduced the Marjah Accelerated Agricultural Transition program. It offered opium farmers an incentive package of cash, wheelbarrows, shovels, new water pumps, and all-important safe-conduct passes to move securely through this war zone. Despite the Taliban's "night letters . . . forbidding locals from interacting with coalition forces," the Marines were encouraged that more than 1,000 local

By 2016, President Obama was forced to reverse his drawdown and launch a mini-surge of hundreds of new US troops to deny insurgents the economic prize of the world's most productive poppy fields

Same Again?

In strategic Helmand and Nangarhar provinces, for instance, satellite photographs clearly reveal that the various drug eradication projects ripped through remote areas where “the population was highly dependent on opium poppy for its livelihoods,” rendering poor farmers destitute

farmers signed up for the program.

In the end, however, it wasn't sustainable. Four years later in 2014, as American troop levels in the country were beginning to fall, General Daniel Yoo stood before his Marines at Camp Leatherneck in Helmand Province and announced that they would all soon be heading home, leaving the province's security in the hands of their Afghan allies. “I am cautiously optimistic that they will be able to sustain themselves,” the general said, “but they've got to want it more than we do.”

Within a year, the Taliban were back, stronger than ever. Amid a nationwide offensive, the guerrillas focused, above all, on recapturing the poppy heartlands of Helmand Province, because, as the New York Times put it, “the lucrative opium trade made it crucial to the insurgents' economic designs.” By December 2015, after overrunning checkpoints and winning back much of the province, they came close to capturing Marjah itself. Had American Special Operations forces and airpower not intervened to relieve “demoralized” Afghan troops and police, the town would undoubtedly have fallen.

Farther north, in the fertile poppy fields astride the Helmand River system, insurgents captured most of Sangin district, forcing the retreat of government soldiers who, hobbled by the endemic corruption of their government and military, were reportedly “fighting with lack of ammunition and on empty stomachs.” By 2016, President Obama was forced to reverse his drawdown and launch a mini-surge of hundreds of new US troops to deny insurgents the economic prize of the world's most productive poppy fields.

Despite support from American air power and 700 Special Operations troops, in February and March 2016 embattled government forces retreated from Musa Qala and Khan Neshin, leaving the Taliban largely in control of 10 of Helmand's 14 districts. After 3,000 government troops died in that Tali-

ban offensive, the remaining demoralized forces hunkered down inside provincial and district capitals, leaving the countryside and the opium crops that went with it to the heroin-funded guerrillas.

In the midst of all that fighting, Helmand's farmers managed to expand their poppy cultivation to 80,000 hectares by 2016, which represented 40 percent of the entire country's drug production.

Sophisticated methodology

Not only did this problematic drug war fail to curtail the traffic, but it also alienated the rural residents the government so desperately needed to win over. Worse yet, in the end it actually encouraged illicit opium production – a frequent outcome in Washington's worldwide drug war that I once called “the stimulus of prohibition.”

Using sophisticated satellite imagery, Sopko's team, for example, found a troubling disconnect between areas that received development aid from Washington or its allies and those that were subjected to opium eradication programs. In strategic Helmand and Nangarhar provinces, for instance, satellite photographs clearly reveal that the various drug eradication projects ripped through remote areas where “the population was highly dependent on opium poppy for its livelihoods,” rendering poor farmers destitute. The development aid was, however, lavished on more accessible, largely drug-free districts near major cities elsewhere in Afghanistan, leaving countless thousands of farmers in critical rural areas angry at the government and susceptible to Taliban recruitment.

Even liberal development alternatives to those rip-up-the-poppies programs, claims Sopko, only served to stimulate opium production in surprising ways. The US Agency for International Development (USAID), for instance, spent \$36-million on irrigation for a showcase Food Zone project, meant to promote the growing of legal crops in southern Kandahar Province. As it happened, though,

this important infrastructure programme actually turned out to contribute “to rising levels of opium poppy cultivation” – an unintended outcome that could be seen in similar “irrigation projects in provinces like Nangarhar, Badakhshan, and Kunar.”

Next door to Kandahar in central Helmand Province, another Food Zone program initially helped reduce the opium crop by 60 percent. But as British agronomist David Mansfield reports, by the spring of 2017 an “unprecedented” proliferation of poppies covered up to 40 percent of the farmland targeted by that project; guerrillas were back in force; and farmers felt, as one put it, that “the Taliban is better than the government; they don’t ban poppy, they just ask for tax.” By now, of course, given all the years of bungled anti-drug programs, Mansfield concludes that the Kabul government has little hope of wresting “back control of central Helmand.”

USAID programmes that emphasised increased wheat production proved similarly counterproductive. “With higher-yielding varieties and improved agricultural technologies,” writes Sopko, “households in the well-irrigated central valleys of rural Afghanistan would be able to meet their family wheat requirements with a smaller part of their land,” allowing “a larger area . . . to be allocated to [the] high-value . . . opium poppy.”

An uncertain future

Corroborating Sopko’s pessimism, a recent report by Mujib Mashal of the New York Times depicted the worsening Afghan drug situation as the product, in part, of Washington’s failed policies. Fuelled by a booming opium harvest, the Taliban has recently expanded from poppy growing into large-scale heroin production with an estimated 500 labs refining the drug inside Afghanistan – part of a strategy aimed at capturing a greater share of the \$60-billion generated globally by the country’s drug exports.

Out of the whole opium eradication

project, the National Interdiction Unit, an Afghan outfit trained by US Special Forces, is more or less what’s left when it comes to hopes for reducing the traffic in drugs. Yet their night-time helicopter interdiction raids on mobile, readily reconstructed heroin labs are proving futile and their chief, reports Mashal, was recently sacked for “probably leaking information to hostile forces.” US military commanders now realise that local Taliban bosses, enriched by the heroin boom, have nothing to gain from further peace negotiations, which remain the only way of ending this endless war.

Meanwhile, the whole question of opium eradication has, according to Mashal, gotten surprisingly “little attention in the Trump administration’s new strategy for the Afghan war.” It seems that US counter-narcotics officials have come to accept a new reality “with a sense of helplessness” – that the country now supplies 85 percent of the world’s heroin and there’s no end to this in sight.

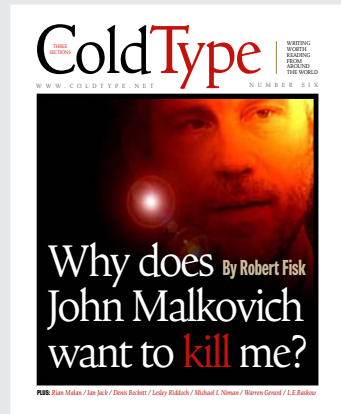
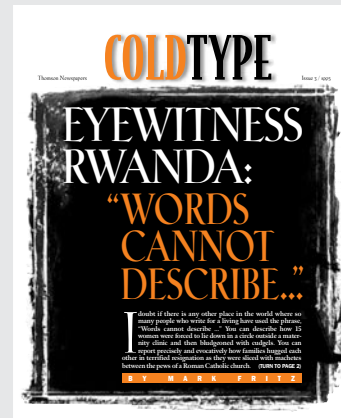
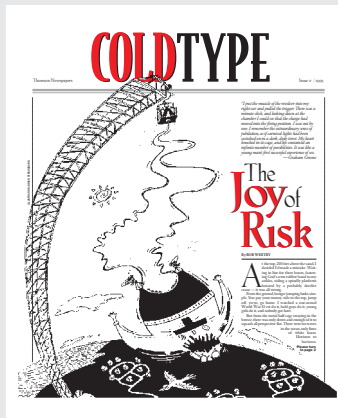
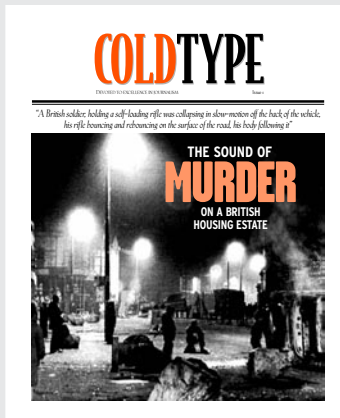
So why has America’s ambitious \$9-billion counter-narcotics program fallen into failure again and again? When such illegality corrupts a society as thoroughly as opium has Afghanistan, then drug trafficking comes to distort everything – giving even good programmes bad outcomes and undoubtedly twisting Trump’s headstrong plans for victory into certain defeat.

Think of the never-ending war in Afghanistan as Washington’s drug of choice of these last 16 years. **CT**

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*Alfred W. McCoy is the Harrington professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of the now-classic book *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, which probed the conjuncture of illicit narcotics and covert operations over 50 years, and the recently published *In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of US Global Power* (Dispatch Books). This essay was first published at www.tomdispatch.com*

US military commanders now realise that local Taliban bosses, enriched by the heroin boom, have nothing to gain from further peace negotiations, which remain the only way of ending this endless war

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MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL...

Neil Clark shows how British Prime Minister Theresa May's paranoid claims about Russian dirty tricks can be more accurately be applied to the UK and its closest ally

It was Dr Samuel Johnson who famously declared in 1775 that patriotism was the last refuge of the scoundrel. The 2017 variant is to make unsubstantiated claims about the "Russian threat" to Western democracies.

In her speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet in the City of London on November 13, British Prime Minister Theresa May escalated the anti-Russian rhetoric still further with a deeply paranoid address that sounded as if it had been penned in 1953 by the late US Senator Joe McCarthy during one of his drunken binges.

Any psychologist watching Mrs May would have had a field day identifying examples of what mind doctors call "projection" – ie attributing to others what you are guilty of yourself. In fact every one of May's



Illustration: Anthony Jenkins

claims against Russia can be more accurately applied to the UK and its closest allies.

The prime minister stated, "It is Russia's actions which threaten the international order on which we

Cover Story

Yes, fake news is threatening democracy, but its Western Establishment-approved and Establishment-disseminated fake news – the sort you read in neocon-approved “sensible newspapers” and media outlets – which has caused the most damage

all depend.”

Really, Mrs May? Was it Russia who illegally invaded Iraq in 2003, causing the deaths of up to a million people and the rise of Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL)? Was it Russia who destroyed Libya in 2011, turning the country with the highest Human Development Index (HDI) rating in Africa into a failed state and jihadist playground on the shores of the Mediterranean? Was it Russia who illegally bombed Yugoslavia, without UN approval, in 1999? Or Russia who backed radical jihadists – many of them linked to Al-Qaeda – to overthrow the Syrian government? In fact, it was the US, the UK and their allies who did all these things. But let’s not mention them, shall we, prime minister?

May says her aim is “to defend the rules-based international order against irresponsible states that seek to erode it.” That’s just like the American gangster John Dillinger saying his aim in 1933 was “to defend banks against individuals who seek to rob them.”

Eroding international law

The truth is that British governments, acting in tandem with the US, who have done most to erode international law in recent decades – not Russia.

The prime minister boldly declared that “Russia has fomented conflict in the Donbass,” but it was the Americans and their NATO/EU allies who fomented conflict in Ukraine in 2014 by supporting and bank-rolling an uprising against the democratically-elected government of Viktor Yanukovich, in which neo-Nazis and virulently anti-Russian ultra-Nationalists provided the cutting edge.

Concern over these developments among the Russian population of Ukraine led to a referendum, in which the people of Crimea overwhelmingly, and quite understandably, voted to return to Russia. The Maybot – who “consistently voted” for the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2002/3 – characterises this exercise in democracy as “Russia’s illegal annex-

ation of Ukraine.” If you’re going down this line, you may as well talk about “Britain’s illegal annexation of Gibraltar,” or the “UK invasion of the Isle of Wight.”

May declared that “Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea was the first time since the Second World War that one sovereign nation has forcibly taken territory from another in Europe.” Well, that’ll be news to the people of Serbia who saw resource-rich Kosovo – the cradle of their civilisation – forcibly taken away from them following a NATO bombing campaign.

May, like the good neocon she is, accuses Russian “state-run media” of planting “fake stories,” but interestingly fails to come up with a single example.

Well, I’m a kind soul, so let me help her. Here are some examples of ‘fake news’ – all of which have appeared in the Western media:

- The fake news that Iraq possessed WMDs in 2003, which led to the illegal invasion of that country and catastrophic consequences for the whole world.

- The fake news that Muammar Gaddafi was about to massacre the civilians of Benghazi in 2011, which again led to another bloody Western military intervention.

- The fake news in 2010 and other times, too, that Iran was on the brink of developing a nuclear bomb.

- The fake news that Russians had hacked into the Vermont electricity grid.

- Or (no sniggering at the back, please) the news that Russia used Pokemon GO to try to “sow division” in the run-up to the US election.

Is that enough examples of fake news for you, Theresa, or would you like some more? Yes, fake news is threatening democracy, but its Western Establishment-approved and Establishment-disseminated fake news – the sort you read in neocon-approved “sensible newspapers” and media outlets – which has caused the most damage. Where did those Iraqi WMDs get to, I wonder?

As for unsubstantiated accusations of

Russian meddling in Western elections, again the chutzpah of Mrs May is off the scale. Britain and the US have seen it as their right to meddle in elections around the globe for decades. Political scientist Dov H. Levin calculated that the US attempted to influence foreign elections 81 times in the period 1946-2000, and that figure does not include support for military coups and other “regime change” ops.

The UK has often been heavily involved in these nefarious anti-democratic schemes, too – for example, in Iran in 1953 when Mohammed Mossadeq was toppled, and in Yugoslavia in 2000. In his biography of Slobodan Milosevic, the ousted Yugoslav leader, Adam LeBor notes that more than \$70-million was paid to the anti-Socialist Serbian opposition, with the Otpor youth movement receiving much of the funding. “And who was behind Otpor?” LeBor writes, quoting a “high-level Serbian source.” The answer: “The US and Britain.” What a surprise.

Again, being accused by a prominent member of the UK Establishment of interfering in other countries’ elections is like being accused of tax evasion by Al Capone, or being told to sit up straight by the Hunchback of Notre Dame. The hypocrisy is truly mind-boggling.

Simple messages

The prime minister, having accused the Kremlin of trying to “sow discord” in the West then came over all Churchillian, by declaring she had a “very simple message for Russia.”

“We know what you are doing. And you will not succeed. Because you underestimate the resilience of our democracies, the enduring attraction of free and open societies, and the commitment of Western nations to the alliances that bind us.”

Well, I and millions of Britons, have a very simple message for Theresa May. We know what you are doing too. You are not “strong and stable” but a weak and wobbly prime minister who is trying to distract

us from the domestic failings of your own government by trying to scare us witless over a nonexistent Russian threat. You are hoping that by raising the spectre of the Big Bad Russian Bear we will forget about your promise to cap household energy bills, the scandal of rip-off train fares and the impact of cruel and heartless austerity policies on millions of people across the country. And ignore the fact that you’re giving the country absolutely no leadership or direction on the issue of Brexit.

The safety and security of Britain is indeed threatened, Prime Minister, not by the bogeyman Putin but by the disastrous policies that yours and other British governments have followed in recent years. Policies such as illegally invading Middle Eastern countries and backing violent jihadist groups to topple secular governments as in Libya and Syria. Or lifting control orders on terrorist organisations such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and allowing them to travel unhindered in and out of the country. Who was the British home secretary when that happened? Why, one Theresa May!

Ironically on the day that May was trying to give us sleepless nights about the Russian “threat,” the BBC – the national state broadcaster – had revealed details of something truly nightmarish. Namely a secret deal which allowed some 250 fanatical IS fighters to safely leave the city of Raqqa – under the gaze of US and British-led forces.

We know, too, that the British authorities have said that Britons returning from formerly IS-held territories in Syria and Iraq should not be prosecuted. The security implications of these policies are very clear. Once again, who is it that’s putting British citizens’ lives at risk? **CT**

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The safety and security of Britain is indeed threatened, Prime Minister, not by the bogeyman Putin but by the disastrous policies that yours and other British governments have followed in recent years

Fight the disease, not the symptoms

Chris Hedges shows how global capitalism destroys democracy, and indicates how working class movements can campaign against its excesses

Globalised corporate capitalism disempowers underpaid and unprotected workers, many toiling in global sweatshops, keeping them cowed, anxious and compliant

The disease of globalised corporate capitalism has the same effects across the planet. It weakens or destroys democratic institutions, making them subservient to corporate and oligarchic power. It forces domestic governments to give up control over their economies, which operate under policies dictated by global corporations, banks, the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund. It casts aside hundreds of millions of workers now classified as “redundant” or “surplus” labour. It disempowers underpaid and unprotected workers, many toiling in global sweatshops, keeping them cowed, anxious and compliant. It financialises the economy, creating predatory global institutions that extract money from individuals, institutions and states through punishing forms of debt peonage. It shuts down genuine debate on corporate-owned media platforms, especially in regard to vast income disparities and social inequality. And the destruction empowers proto-fascist movements and governments.

These proto-fascist forces discredit verifiable fact and history and replace them with myth. They peddle nostalgia for lost glory. They attack the spiritual bankruptcy of the modern, technocratic world. They are xenophobic. They champion the “virtues” of a hyper-masculinity and the warrior cult. They preach regeneration through violence.

They rally around demagogues who absolve followers of moral choice and promise strength and protection. They marginalise and destroy all individuals and institutions, including schools, that make possible self-criticism, self-reflection and transcendence and that nurture empathy, especially for the demonised. This is why artists and intellectuals are ridiculed and silenced. This is why dissent is attacked as an act of treason.

These movements are also deeply misogynistic. They disempower girls and women to hand a perverted power to men who feel powerless in the global economy. They blame ethnic and religious minorities for the national decline. They foster bizarre conspiracy theories. And they communicate in the Orwellian newspeak of alternative facts. They claim the sole right to represent and use indigenous patriotic and religious symbols.

India, built on the foundations of caste slavery, has become one of many new neo-feudal states, among them Turkey, Poland, Russia and the United States. Its neo-feudal structure continues to carry out atrocities against Dalits – the former “untouchables” – and now increasingly against Muslims. India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who as the chief minister of the western Indian state of Gujarat oversaw a vicious anti-Muslim pogrom, has defended sectarian discrimination and violence even though this



Non-violent resisters are were sprayed with water cannons and teargas during the 2016 anti-pipeline demonstrations at Standing Rock.

year he made a tepid declaration that “[w]e will not tolerate violence in the name of faith” and issued other unconvincing appeals for religious peace. As prime minister he has employed threats, harassment and force to silence those who decry human rights abuses and atrocities carried out in India. He attacks his critics as “anti-national” – the equivalent of “unpatriotic” in the United States.

Modi, like his fellow demagogues in other parts of the world, including Donald Trump, speaks in the language of moral purity and promotes self-serving historical myths. Indians who eat beef – a huge number – are targeted, school history books are being rewritten to conform to right-wing Hindu ideology and its open admiration for fascism, and entertainers considered too political or too salacious are under attack.

There are within America’s corporate power structures individuals, parties and groups that find the hysterical, imbecilic and irrational rants of demagogues such as Trump repugnant. They seek a return to the polished mendacity of politicians such as Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. They hope to promote the interests of global

capitalism by maintaining the fiction of a functioning democracy and an open society. These “moderates” or “liberals,” however, are also the architects of the global corporate pillage. They created the political vacuum that the demagogues and proto-fascist movements have filled. They blind themselves to their own complicity. They embrace their own myths – such as the belief that former FBI Director James Comey and the Russians were responsible for the election of Trump – to avoid examining the social inequality that is behind the global crisis and their defeat.

The 400 richest individuals in the United States have more wealth than the bottom 64 percent of the population, and the three richest Americans have more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of the US population. This social inequality will only get worse as the weak controls that once regulated the economy and the tax code are abolished or rewritten to further increase the concentration of wealth among the ruling oligarchs. Social inequality at this level, history has shown, always results in these types of pathologies and political distortions. It also, potentially, presages revolution.

Enraged workers, lied to for decades by “liberal” politicians such as Bill and Hillary Clinton and Obama, delight in Trump’s crude taunts and insults directed at the power structure and elites they loath

Header Header

During the long encampment at Standing Rock, which took place under the Obama administration, the non-violent resisters were physically attacked by police, the National Guard and private security contractors

The short-term political and economic gains made by the Democratic Party and liberal class in the last few decades came at the expense of the working class. The liberal class, because of its complicity in globalisation, has destroyed its credibility as well as the credibility of the “liberal” democratic values it claims to represent. Enraged workers, lied to for decades by “liberal” politicians such as Bill and Hillary Clinton and Obama, delight in Trump’s crude taunts and insults directed at the power structure and elites they loath. Many Americans are perhaps aware that Trump is a con artist, but he at least appears to share their disdain for the “liberal” elites who abandoned them.

It will eventually become apparent to some, perhaps many, of Trump’s supporters that he is cravenly in the service of the one percent and has turbocharged the corporate kleptocracy. The Democratic Party, busy purging Bernie Sanders supporters from its ranks, is banking on this epiphany to revive its political fortunes. The Democratic leadership has no real political strategy, other than to hope that Trump implodes. They are backing and funding opposition movements such as Indivisible and the women’s marches, as well as the witch hunt about Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election, all of which have as their sole focus removing Trump and restoring the Democratic Party to power. This form of resistance is sterile and useless.

But there are other resistance movements – the most prominent being the battle by the water protectors at Standing Rock to block the Dakota Access pipeline – that attack the disease. It is easy to tell the resistance from the faux resistance by the response of the state. During the women’s marches, Democrats, including Debbie Wasserman Schultz, were honoured participants. The police were usually courteous and helped facilitate the marches; arrests were few and coverage by the corporate press was sympathetic. In contrast, during the long encampment at Standing

Rock, which took place under the Obama administration, the non-violent resisters were physically attacked by police, the National Guard and private security contractors. These forces used dogs, pepper spray, water cannons in sub-zero temperatures, sound machines, drones, armoured vehicles and hundreds of arrests in their efforts to destroy the resistance.

Attack the symptoms and the state will be passive. Attack the disease and the state will be ruthless.

Once Trump’s base begins to abandon him – the repression in Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is a good example of what will happen – the political landscape will turn very ugly. Trump and his allies, in a desperate bid to cling to power, will openly stoke hate crimes and violence against Muslims, undocumented workers, African-Americans, progressives, intellectuals, feminists and dissidents. He and his allies on the “alt-right” and the Christian right will move to silence all organs of dissent, including corporate media outlets fighting to restore the patina of civility that is the window dressing to corporate pillage. They will harness the power of the nation’s substantial internal security apparatus to crush public protests and to jail opponents, even those who are part of the faux resistance.

Time is not on our side. If we can build counter-capitalist movements that include the working class we have a chance. If we can, like the water protectors at Standing Rock, mount sustained acts of defiance in the face of severe state repression, we have a chance. If we can organise nationwide campaigns of non-cooperation we have a chance. We cannot be distracted by the symptoms. We must cure the disease. **CT**

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Chris Hedges has reported from more than 50 countries and has worked for *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The New York Times*, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. This essay was first published at www.truthdig.com

Inappropriate behaviour: the political reality

The 'mainstream' media is quick to savage government ministers' sexual failings, but ignores their warmongering, writes **David Edwards**

The truth of corporate journalism, and the great irony of its obsession with "fake news," is that it is itself utterly fake. What could be more obviously fake than the idea that truth can be sold by billionaire-owned media dependent on billionaire-owned advertisers for maximised profit?

The "mainstream" worldview is anything but – it is extreme, weird, a product of corporate conformity and deference to power. As Norman Mailer observed: "There is an odour to any Press Headquarters that is unmistakable. . . . The unavoidable smell of flesh burning quietly and slowly in the service of a machine."

A prime example of "mainstream" extremism is the way the UK's illegal wars destroying whole countries are not an issue for corporate moralists. Physicians for Global Responsibility estimate that 1.3-million people have been killed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan alone. And yet it is simply understood that UK wars will not be a theme during general elections. By contrast, other kinds of "inappropriate behaviour" are subject to intense scrutiny.

Consider the recent resignation of Defence Secretary Michael Fallon and his replacement by Prime Minister Theresa May's Chief Whip, Gavin Williamson. Fallon resigned after it was revealed that he had "repeatedly touched the broadcaster Julia

Hartley-Brewer's knee at a dinner in 2002."

Fallon was damaged further by revelations that he had lunged at journalist Jane Merrick: "This was not a farewell peck on the cheek, but a direct lunge at my lips."

The Commons leader Andrea Leadsom also disclosed that she had complained about "lewd remarks" Fallon had made to her.

Sexual harassment is a serious issue, despite the scoffing of some male commentators. In the Mail on Sunday, Peter Hitchens shamefully dismissed women's complaints as mere "squawking." But it is strange indeed that, while harassment is rightly deemed a resigning offence, other "inappropriate behaviour" leaves 'mainstream' commentators completely unmoved.

Fallon voted for both the 2003 war that destroyed Iraq and the 2011 war that wrecked Libya. He voted for war on Syria. He voted for replacing the Trident nuclear missile system. Earlier this year, he even declared that Britain would be willing to launch a nuclear first strike.

After he was made Secretary of Defence in July 2014, Fallon oversaw the supply of weapons to Saudi Arabia waging war on Yemen. Two years later, Campaign Against Arms Trade reported that UK sales to Saudi Arabia since the start of the war included £2.2-billion of aircraft, helicopters and drones, £1.1-billion of missiles, bombs and

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Police escort as Britain's disgraced defence Secretary Michael Fallon leaves Downing Street. Photo: Katie Chan, via Wikipedia

In December 2016, Fallon admitted that internationally banned cluster munitions supplied by the UK had been used in Saudi Arabia's bombing campaign

grenades, and nearly half a million pounds' worth of tanks and other armoured vehicles. British sales of military equipment to the kingdom topped £1.1-billion in the first half of this year alone.

In December 2016, Fallon admitted that internationally banned cluster munitions supplied by the UK had been used in Saudi Arabia's bombing campaign. Six months earlier, Amnesty International had reported that British-made cluster bombs were being used in attacks on civilians that had claimed the lives of children. For none of these horrors did Fallon resign.

So what kind of conflict are these weapons fuelling? The Guardian reports this week earlier this month: "Yemen is in the grip of the world's worst cholera outbreak and seven-million people are already on the brink of famine."

In July, Reliefweb reported: "The scale of the food crisis in conflict-ridden Yemen is staggering with 17-million people – two

thirds of the population – severely food insecure and seven-million of these on the verge of famine."

Director-General of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, José Graziano da Silva, has described Yemen as the UN's "largest humanitarian crisis today," noting that conflict and violence have disrupted agriculture, with violence intensifying in areas most short of food. In December 2016, a study by UNICEF, the UN children's agency, found that at least one child was dying in Yemen every 10 minutes. The agency found that, since 2014, there had been a 200 per cent increase in children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, with almost half a million affected. Nearly 2.2 million children were in need of urgent care.

This month, the Saudi-led coalition declared it would close Yemen's borders to prevent an alleged flow of weapons from Iran, after it intercepted a missile attack by Houthi rebels near Riyadh, the Saudi capi-

tal. Johan Mooij, Yemen director of Care International, commented: “For the last two days, nothing has got in or out of the country. Fuel prices have gone up by 50 percent and there are queues at the gas stations. People fear no more fuel will come into Ho-deidah port.”

He added: “People depend on the humanitarian aid and part of the cholera issue [is] that they do not eat and are not strong enough to deal with unclean water.”

There have been “daily airstrikes in Sana’a,” Mooij said, adding: “People fear the situation is escalating.”

The UN’s World Food Program said that, out of Yemen’s entire population of 28-million people, about 20-million, “do not know where they’re going to get their next meal.” These are Fallon’s millions, May’s millions, the “mainstream’s” millions.

In the Independent, Mary Dejevsky made the only mention of Yemen in an article discussing Fallon’s resignation that we have seen in the national corporate press: “In the Middle East [on Fallon’s watch], the UK made great efforts to maintain its alliance with Saudi Arabia – and the arms sales that went with it – playing down the desperate plight of Yemen which was a by-product of this policy.”

Mass death, Iraq and Libya destroyed, millions of lives torn apart, profiteering in the billions from the torture of an impoverished, famine-stricken nation – none of this was deemed worthy even of mention in considering the record of Fallon and his “inappropriate behaviour.”

As for his replacement, the Guardian’s Andrew Sparrow tweeted a link to his blog piece titled: “10 things you might not know about Gavin Williamson.” Vital facts included news that the new Defence Secretary “kept a pet tarantula called Cronus on his desk,” “likes hedgehogs,” “is only 41,” and “went to a comprehensive school.”

Sparrow was adhering to the journalistic convention that parliamentary politics should be depicted as a light-hearted,

Wodehousian farce. It is all a bit of a laugh – everybody means well. Despite Williamson’s lethal new role, the word “war” was not mentioned.

Preoccupied with spiders and hedgehogs, Sparrow found no space to mention that Williamson “almost always voted for use of UK military forces in combat operations overseas.” He voted for war in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. He voted against the Yemen motion put before the House of Commons in October 2016 that merely called on the Government to suspend its support for the Saudi Arabia-led coalition forces in Yemen until it had been determined whether they had been responsible for war crimes. The motion was defeated by 283 votes to 193, telling us everything we need to know about the “mainstream’s” much-loved myth that British policy is motivated by a “responsibility to protect.”

The BBC’s political editor Laura Kuenssberg tweeted a link to the BBC’s own comedy profile, which also discussed the tarantula and other nonsense, and made no mention of Williamson’s record on war. I asked Kuenssberg: “Will you be asking him if he has any regrets on voting against the Yemen motion to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia, given the vast civilian crisis?”

I received no reply.

The extreme cognitive dissonance guiding “mainstream” moral outrage was again highlighted by the Guardian columnist Gaby Hinsliff, who tweeted: “Can’t help thinking that now would be quite a good time for the first ever female defence secretary, really.”

I asked: “What difference would it make to the civilians dying under our bombs in Yemen and Syria? Isn’t that the key issue on ‘defence?’”

Hinsliff did not reply. But the answer, of course, is that it would make no difference at all.

CT

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David Edwards is co-editor of *Medialens*, the UK media watchdog -- www.medialens.org



The abandoned city. Bowery & Bleeker Street 1981

Wasteland, New York

Edward Grazda's images capture a world long past, when New York City was bankrupt, its streets abandoned to hustlers, preachers, bums – the empty industrial buildings occupied by artists and photographers

In the late 1970s and early 80s, the civic leaders of a bankrupt New York City handed power to the banks, which instituted austerity programmes that gutted the city. Most of the traditional industries fled, and the streets were abandoned to hustlers, preachers, drunks and bums. In the midst of this upheaval, a new generation of artists moved in, squatting in empty industrial buildings downtown, their work bearing witness to the urban decay and institutional decay.

Renowned photographer Edward Grazda was one of those new residents, moving into a rent-controlled loft on the edge of the Bowery in early 1973. “Out my front window was a statue of Christ, on the Holy Name Center across the street. It was lit up at night, The loft was to be my base for 40 years,” he says.

Grazda's images from those times, gathered in his latest book, **Mean Streets: NYC 1970-85**, record for posterity the exuberance, and the distress, of a not-so-distant past that powerbrokers have tried to erase from the city's collective memory in the financially solvent years that followed the slump.



Dead or alive? Bowery 1976



Bankrupt city. Delancey Street 1976



Winning hand. Bowery & Bleecker Street 1981

In The Picture



Midday cowboy. Midtown 1970

In a short note, playwright Gary Leon Hill, who lived in the same apartment block as Grazda, writes: “Here is a time and place before the money came, before valet parking, before smart phones recorded everything you ate, when seeing meant more than being seen, before Jesus jumped.

“Two gentlemen from the SRO look up at Bleecker and Elizabeth. They see Jesus on the roof, palms open to the sky, every morning. Well, says the one, he hasn’t jumped yet. And that is solace.

“Once, “artists pioneered this wasteland. Tapped into gas lines, dodged Con Ed, lived where they said they didn’t live, and daily hit the streets to document and witness. I’d hear Ed pound down six flights of stairs past me on two and shoot out the front door . . . Always with his Leica, moving unseen.



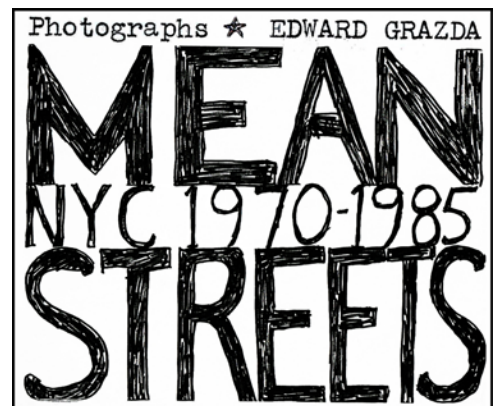
Somewhere to sleep. Bowery 1973



Street life. Broadway & 55th Street 1970



Headline news. D Train 1980



MEAN STREETS: NYC 1970-1985

Edward Grazda

Published by powerHouse Books

www.powerhousebooks.com

Price \$23.79 (amazon.com)

In The Picture



Jesus blesses his children from his perch atop Bleecker and Elizabeth Streets, 1980

“Grazda ghosted through these streets like they knew him, often catching them off guard, between heart beats, between coughing and choking, between laughing hard and falling down. Rarely seen himself or taken notice of, he moved like a wraith past cars big as boats being stripped for parts then set on fire, abandoned televisions blazing whipped by the wind, prostitutes and sidewalk preachers, a restive three card Monte dealer working from a crouch, and Ed, scavenging, sluicing for gold.

“Andy, the elevator guy in our building, used to stand on the sidewalk and shake his head: ‘It’s like Sodom and Gloria all over again,’ he’d say.”

Now the area has lost its Christ, its bums, its hustlers, its preachers, its “Sodom and Gloria” – and its soul. The city streets have been cleansed; the area gentrified. There’s no room for diversity when Big Money rolls into town.

Tony Sutton



Under arrest. Little Italy 1974

Mocking Trump does not prove Russia's guilt

President Trump is getting mocked for trusting Vladimir Putin's denial about meddling in US politics, but ridicule isn't evidence, writes **Ray McGovern**

If the bloody debacle in Iraq should have taught Americans anything, it is that endorsements by lots of important people who something is true don't amount to evidence that it actually is true. If endorsements were the same as evidence, US troops would have found tons of WMD in Iraq, rather than come up empty.

So, when it comes to whether or not Russia "hacked" Democratic emails last year and slipped them to WikiLeaks, just because a bunch of people with fancy titles think the Russians are guilty doesn't compensate for the lack of evidence so far evinced to support this core charge.

But the reaction of Official Washington and the US mainstream media to President Trump saying that Russian President Vladimir Putin seemed sincere in denying Russian "meddling" was sputtering outrage: How could Trump doubt what so many important people think is true?

Yet, if the case were all that strong that Russia did "hack" the emails, you would have expected a straightforward explication of the evidence rather than a demonstration of a full-blown groupthink, but what we got in the second week of November was all groupthink and no evidence.

For instance, CNN responded on November 10 to Trump's comment that Putin seems to "mean it" when he denied meddling by running a list of important Ameri-

cans who had endorsed the Russian-guilt verdict. Other US news outlets and politicians followed the same pattern.

Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee and a big promoter of the Russia-gate allegations, scoffed at what Trump said: "You believe a foreign adversary over your own intelligence agencies?"

The Washington Post's headline sitting atop its lead article the following day read: "Trump says Putin sincere in denial of Russian meddling: Critics call that 'unconscionable.'"

Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee and another Russia-gate sparkplug, said he was left "completely speechless" by Trump's willingness to take Putin's word "over the conclusions of our own combined intelligence community."

Which gets us back to the January 6 "Intelligence Community Assessment" and its stunning lack of evidence in support of its Russian guilty verdict. The ICA even admitted as much, that it wasn't asserting Russian guilt as fact but rather as opinion: "Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents."

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Truth & Lies

Not only did the full intelligence community not participate in the ICA but only analysts “handpicked” by Obama’s intelligence chiefs conducted the analysis – and as we intelligence veterans know well, if you handpick the analysts, you are handpicking the conclusions

Even the New York Times, which has led the media groupthink on Russian guilt, initially published the surprised reaction from correspondent Scott Shane, who wrote: “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. . . . Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

In other words, the ICA was not a disposition of fact; it was guesswork, possibly understandable guesswork, but guesswork nonetheless. And guesswork should be open to debate.

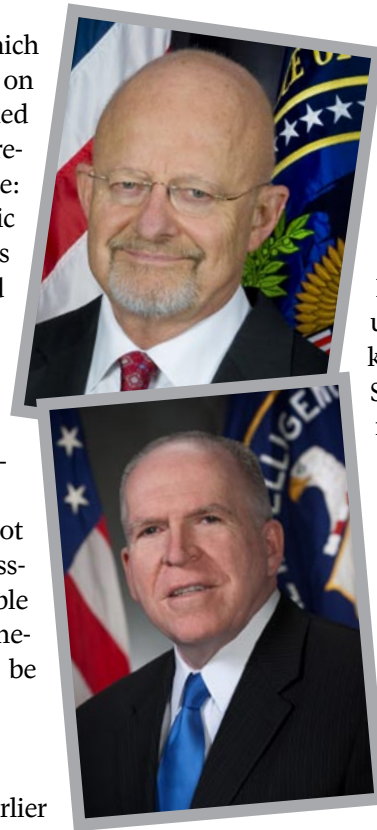
Shutting down debate

But the debate was shut down earlier this year by the oft-repeated claim that all 17 US intelligence agencies concurred in the assessment and how could anyone question what all 17 intelligence agencies concluded!

However, that canard was finally knocked down by President Obama’s own Director of National Intelligence James Clapper who acknowledged in sworn congressional testimony that the ICA was the product of “handpicked” analysts from only three agencies – the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

In other words, not only did the full intelligence community not participate in the ICA but only analysts “handpicked” by Obama’s intelligence chiefs conducted the analysis – and as we intelligence veterans know well, if you handpick the analysts, you are handpicking the conclusions.

For instance, put a group of analysts known for their hardline views on Russia in a room for a few weeks, prevent analysts with dissenting viewpoints from weighing



Top: James Clapper, former Director of National Intelligence. Above: John Brennan, Obama’s CIA Director

in, don’t require any actual evidence, and you are pretty sure to get the Russia-bashing result that you wanted.

So why do you think Clapper and Obama’s CIA Director John Brennan put up the no-entry sign that kept out analysts from the State Department and Defense Intelligence Agency, two entities that might have significant insights into Russian intentions? By all rights, they should have been included. But, clearly, no dissenting footnotes or wider-perspective views were desired.

If you remember the Iraq WMD intelligence estimate, analysts from the State Department’s intelligence bureau, known as INR, offered unwelcome dissenting views about the pace

of Iraq’s supposed nuclear programme, inserting a footnote saying they found it too difficult to predict the fruition of a program when there was no reliable evidence as to when – not to mention if – it had started.

DIA was also demonstrating an unusually independent streak, displaying a willingness to give due consideration to Russia’s perspective. Here’s the heterodox line DIA took in a major report published in December 2015: “The Kremlin is convinced the United States is laying the groundwork for regime change in Russia, a conviction further reinforced by the events in Ukraine. Moscow views the United States as the critical driver behind the crisis in Ukraine and the Arab Spring and believes that the overthrow of former Ukrainian President Yanukovich is the latest move in a long-estab-

Photos: Wikimedia Commons

lished pattern of US-orchestrated regime change efforts.”

So, not only did the January 6 report exclude input from INR and DIA and the other dozen or so intelligence agencies but it even avoided a fully diverse set of opinions from inside the CIA, FBI and NSA. The assessment – or guesswork – came only from those “hand-picked” analysts.

It’s also worth noting that not only does Putin deny that Russia was behind the publication of the Democratic emails but so, too, does WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange, who has insisted repeatedly that the material did not come from the Russians. He and others around WikiLeaks have strongly suggested that the emails came as leaks from Democratic insiders.

Seeking real answers

In the face of Official Washington’s evidence-free groupthink, what some of us former US intelligence analysts have been trying to do is provide both a fuller understanding of Russian behaviour and whatever scientific analysis can be applied to the alleged “hacks.” Forensic investigations and testing of relevant download speeds, reported by members of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), have undermined the Russia-did-it groupthink. But this attempt to engage in actual evaluation of evidence has been either ignored or mocked by mainstream news outlets.

Still, the suggestion in our July 24 VIPS memo that President Trump should ask current CIA Director Mike Pompeo to take a fresh look at the issue had some consequence when Pompeo contacted VIPS member William Binney, a former

NSA technical director, and invited him to explain his latest research on the impossibility of the Russians extracting the Democratic emails via an Internet hack based on known download speeds.

In typically candid terms, Binney explained to Pompeo why VIPS had concluded that the intelligence analysts behind the January 6 report had been making stuff up about Russian “hacking.”

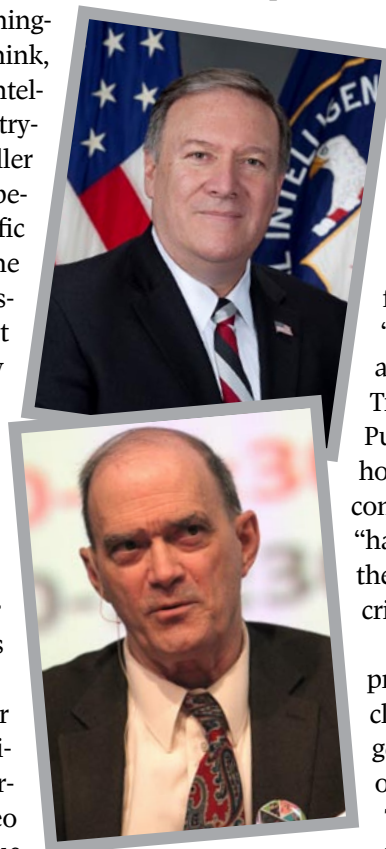
When news of the Binney-Pompeo meeting broke earlier this month, the US mainstream media again rejected the opportunity to rethink the Russia-did-it groupthink and instead treated Binney as some sort of “conspiracy theorist” with a “disputed” theory, while attacking Pompeo’s willingness to discuss Binney’s findings as “politicising intelligence.”

Despite the smearing of Binney, President Trump appears to have taken some of this new evidence to heart, explaining his dispute with open-mouthed White House reporters on Air Force One who had baited Trump with various forms of the same question: “Do you believe Putin?” amid the new jeering about Trump “getting played” by Putin. Trump’s demeanour, however, suggested increased confidence that the Russian “hacking” allegations were the “witch hunt” he has decried for months.

Trump also jabbed the press over its earlier false claims that “all 17 intelligence agencies” concurred on the Russian “hack.” And Trump introduced the idea of a different kind of “hack,” ie, Obama’s political appointees at the heads of the agencies behind the

It’s also worth noting that not only does Putin deny that Russia was behind the publication of the Democratic emails but so, too, does WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange, who has insisted repeatedly that the material did not come from the Russians

Photos: Wikimedia Commons



Top: Current CIA Director Mike Pompeo. Above: William Binney, former NSA technical director.

Comey arranged a leak to the New York Times that was specifically designed to get a special prosecutor appointed to investigate Russia-gate, a job that fell to his old friend Robert Mueller, who has had his own mixed record as the previous FBI director in mishandling the 9/11 investigation

January 6 report. Trump said, “You hear it’s 17 agencies. Well it’s three. And one is Brennan . . . give me a break. They’re political hacks. . . . I mean, you have Brennan, you have Clapper, you have [FBI Director James] Comey. Comey is proven to be a liar and he’s proven to be a leaker.”

Later, in deference to those still at work in intelligence, Trump said, “I’m with our [intelligence] agencies as currently constituted.”

While Trump surely has a dismal record of his own regarding truth-telling, he’s not wrong about the checkered record of the triumvirate of Clapper, Brennan and Comey.

Clapper played a key role in the bogus Iraq-WMD intelligence when he was head of the National Geo-spatial Agency and hid the fact that there was zero evidence in satellite imagery of any weapons of mass destruction before the Iraq invasion. When no WMDs were found, Clapper told the media that he thought they were shipped off to Syria.

In 2013, Clapper perjured himself before Congress by denying NSA’s unconstitutional blanket surveillance of Americans. After evidence emerged revealing the falsity of Clapper’s testimony, he wrote a letter to Congress admitting, “My response was clearly erroneous – for which I apologise.” Despite the deception, he was allowed to stay as Obama’s most senior intelligence officer for almost four more years.

Clapper also has demonstrated an ugly bias about Russians. On May 28, as a former DNI, Clapper explained Russian “interference” in the US election to NBC’s Chuck Todd on May 28 with a tutorial on what everyone should know about “the historical practices of the Russians.” Clapper said, “the Russians, typically, are almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favour, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique.”

Brennan, who had previously defended torture as having been an effective way to gain intelligence, was CIA director when

agency operatives broke into the computers of the Senate Intelligence Committee when it was investigating CIA torture.

Former FBI Director Comey is infamous for letting the Democratic National Committee arrange its own investigation of the “hacking” that was then blamed on Russia, a development that led some members of Congress to call the supposed “hack” an “act of war.” Despite the risk of nuclear conflagration, the FBI didn’t bother to do its own forensics.

And, by his own admission, Comey arranged a leak to the New York Times that was specifically designed to get a special prosecutor appointed to investigate Russia-gate, a job that fell to his old friend Robert Mueller, who has had his own mixed record as the previous FBI director in mishandling the 9/11 investigation.

There are plenty of reasons to want Trump out of the White House, but there also should be respect for facts and due process. So far, the powers-that-be in Washington – in politics, the media and other dominant institutions, what some call the Deep State – have shown little regard for fairness in the Russia-gate “scandal.” The goal seems to be to remove the president or at least emasculate him on a bum rap, giving him the bum’s rush, so to speak, while also further demonising Russia and exacerbating an already dangerous new Cold War.

The truth should still count for something. No one’s character should be assassinated, as Bill Binney’s is being now, for running afoul of the conventional wisdom that Trump – like *bête noire* Putin – never tells the truth, and that to believe either is, well, “unconscionable,” as The Washington Post warns.

CT

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Ray McGovern works with *Tell the Word*, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA intelligence analyst for 27 years and is co-founder of *Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity*.

Facebook wants your nude photos

Amy Binns is sceptical about the media giant's latest scheme to make the Internet safer

Facebook's latest attempt to tackle the non-consensual sharing of sexual pictures (often known as "revenge porn") appeared so wrong-headed that at first it seemed like a joke. But the social network has made clear its system of asking users to send in explicit images that they don't want to appear on the site is a real pilot programme being tested in Australia.

Facebook's motivation is right and proper: to help women (and men) worried that their ex-partners may shame or manipulate them by uploading sexual images taken during the relationship. This unwanted sharing can have devastating consequences. Even the threat that the images could be shared can be used by controlling, violent abusers to force their victims into line, as has been recognised by a new Scottish law to criminalise this.

To prevent people falling victim to this practice, users are urged to use Facebook's Messenger app to send themselves any pictures at risk of being shared. Facebook will then "hash" the image, creating a numerical fingerprint of it. The picture itself can then be deleted and Facebook has said images will not be stored permanently on their servers. When another Facebook user uploads a picture, it will be run through the database of hashes. If it matches an image in the database, it will be blocked and cannot be posted or

shared on Facebook.

Would this work? If a picture uploaded by a vengeful ex is identical to the one uploaded by their frightened victim then yes, it will be blocked. But there is nothing to stop the ex uploading it to another site and linking to it on Facebook, even if it wouldn't appear on Facebook itself.

But what if the ex realises why they have been blocked, and changes the picture slightly? Hashes work for identical pictures. Alex Stamos, chief security officer for Facebook, said that simple changes like re-sizing should not fool the hash. It's not clear whether cropping it, adding a filter or scribbling on the background will create a different hash that will fail to match.

And failure isn't the only problem. What if sharing the images with Facebook actually makes it more likely that they will become public?

The security implications surrounding this are significant. First, just sending an image is a risk. The user is creating a copy of the photo that could be hacked or intercepted, especially if their phone or computer is stolen. Then there is the possibility of human error by the user. It seems likely at least some people will accidentally send the images to someone else in their contact list instead of to themselves.

Finally, there is the enormous issue of how far we can trust Facebook and its staff.

Alex Stamos, chief security officer for Facebook, said that simple changes like re-sizing should not fool the hash. It's not clear whether cropping it, adding a filter or scribbling on the background will create a different hash that will fail to match

Naked Ambition

However good Facebook's own security is, there would be little to stop a disgruntled, bored or malicious employee simply taking pictures of their screen with their phone and uploading them to another site

This is a small pilot and is likely to be run to tight standards. But further issues will likely appear if it is scaled up. In order to create a hash, the picture has to be seen by a member of Facebook's staff. Antigone Davis, Facebook's global head of safety, says the images will only be seen by "a specially trained representative from our community operations team". Doubtless in the pilot these people will be well vetted.

But if this was to be rolled out to Facebook's billion-strong community of users, this team would have to be enormously expanded. The mind-bending work of ill-paid, ill-trained and replaceable community moderators has been well documented. These people, tempted by the idea of a first-rung on a career at a fashionable company, can be traumatised by the endless viewing of horrific pictures of animal cruelty, car crashes and sexual violence, and often burn out within months.

Can Facebook guarantee that these photos, trustingly uploaded by desperate people trying to break free from damaging relationships, will only be seen by responsible staff? Or will they, over time, be farmed out to subcontractors, trainees and people who are themselves damaged by constant exposure to violence and sex

online. However good Facebook's own security is, there would be little to stop a disgruntled, bored or malicious employee simply taking pictures of their screen with their phone and uploading them to another site.

Then there is the corporation itself. The company has a long history of controversial changes to its terms and conditions, including how they use and retain users' data, even after people have quit the platform. They have fought court cases brought by revenge porn victims who feel failed by the system, in one case by a British 14-year-old.

This is a well-meaning initiative, but it's just not clear that we can trust this commercial organisation to make the right decisions about how they hold this most sensitive data. Stamos has complained that the company gets criticised for imperfect solutions. It's true that partial solutions are better than none, and that pre-emptive solutions are better than clean-ups when the damage is done. But this is a solution that carries its own risk. **CT**

Amy Binns is senior lecturer in journalism and digital communication at the University first published at www.theconversation.com



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Canada the good? Not really . . .

Tom Sandborn reviews a new book that exposes some myths about Canada

Did you know that the Canadian military funds the largest public relations machine in the country? Did you know our government hosted the Ottawa Initiative on Haiti in early 2003 (a meeting to which not a single Haitian was invited) to lay the planning groundwork for 2004's coup, a military intervention involving Canadian troops as well as American and French? The coup removed a democratically elected government in Haiti and led to years of death squad violence in the tormented island country.

If you are aware of these facts, seldom, if ever reported in Canada's mainstream media, you are likely familiar with the work of one of this country's hardest working public intellectuals, Yves Engler. If not, you should be.

Engler, who made his bones as a left activist as a student radical at Concordia, has devoted the last decade to tireless criticism of Canadian foreign policy. He is one of the few Canadian writers to challenge the national myth that Canada is "a force for good" in the world (a position held by nine out of ten surveyed here and cast into doubt by any objective assessment of the role Canada has played as the go-to ally to support

American imperialism and the interests of predatory Canadian companies around the world.)

Successfully branded as a champion of peace and human rights, Canada has been a useful corporate home for the mining companies that flock to incorporate in a country that doesn't ask too many inconvenient questions about human rights and environmental abuses. These companies dig for gold, copper or uranium in the third world, and for impunity in Ottawa.

Engler's earlier books include *Canada in Africa: 300 Years of Aid and Exploitation*, *The Ugly Canadian: Stephen Harper's Foreign Policy*, *Lester Pearson's Peacekeeping: The Truth May Hurt*, *Stop Signs: Cars and Capitalism on the Road to Economic, Social and Ecological Decay* (with Bianca

Canada has been a useful corporate home for the mining companies that flock to incorporate in a country that doesn't ask too many inconvenient questions about human rights and environmental abuses



A PROPAGANDA SYSTEM

How Canada's Government, Corporations, Media and Academia Sell War and Exploitation

By Yves Engler

Co-published by
RED Publishing and
Fernwood Publishing

Softcover: \$19.95

Exposing Propaganda

Engler is the first commentator I have encountered who boldly declares that Lester Pearson, far from being the avuncular champion of peacemaking he is portrayed as in most accounts, was a war criminal

Mugenyi), *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* (shortlisted for the Mavis Gallant Prize for Non Fiction in the Quebec Writers' Federation Literary Awards), *Playing Left Wing: From Rink Rat to Student Radical*, and (with Anthony Fenton) *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on The Poor Majority*, and *Canada and Israel: Building Apartheid*.

In the clumsily titled, *A Propaganda System: How Canada's Government, Corporations, Media and Academia Sell War and Exploitation*, Engler provides a detailed and lucid description of the network of direct military public relations bodies, corporate sponsored think tanks, academics and big companies that cooperate in promoting the myth of Canada's selfless foreign policy and obfuscating the true role of many of our foreign policy and foreign aid initiatives, the protection and promotion of company profits and power around the world.

Engler is the first commentator I have encountered who boldly declares that Lester Pearson, far from being the avuncular champion of peacemaking he is portrayed as in most accounts, was a war criminal, deeply complicit in many moments of US imperialism.

At a moment when the phrase "fake news" has a lot of currency, this is an important read for anyone who sometimes suspects that Canada's highly concentrated business-controlled media may be purveying an unhealthy slice of pro-business, pro-imperialism propaganda-fake news in service to predatory power.

Engler's goal is to deliver the results of his impressively thorough research in accessible language and down to earth met-

aphor. For example, the author, a former junior hockey player, repeatedly and entertainingly argues that the Canadian military and the business class it serves are best understood by seeing the parallels between the Canadian Forces and the Montreal Canadiens – dubious enterprises that are propped up by major public relations campaigns. This is only one example of Engler's fluent, genuinely popularising style, which makes his books both informative and easy to read and digest.

But all his research and the virtues of his prose style can only have an impact if his books are widely read, and this country's mainstream media show no interest in reviewing works that run counter to the interests of big advertisers and the military.

Un-reviewed and little known outside of left circles, Engler's books don't have the wide readership they deserve, at least not yet. I urge every reader to pick up a copy of *A Propaganda System*. If you agree that this is vitally important information and analysis, pass your copy on to friends and family, and promote the book and the author on social media.

As another Montreal writer, Leonard Cohen wrote "Everybody knows that the dice are loaded," but most of us need the kind of specific detail that Engler spells out in this book to help protect us from the pro-business propaganda that loads the dice in the nations newspapers and broadcast journalism. If you desire a Canada that lives up to its currently undeserved good reputation, read and promote the works of this writer. **CT**

.....
Tom Sandborn lives and writes in Vancouver.

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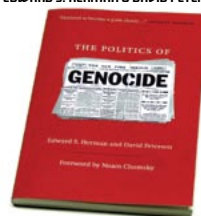
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When Britain broke its promise to Palestine

Jonathan Cook writes on the anniversary of the 1917 Balfour Declaration that turned Palestine into a 'national home for the Jewish people.'

Ron Fassbender photographed protests that marked the event in London



RON FASSBENDER'S photographs show some of the thousands of people who joined a protest in London, organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, on the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. Calling for justice and equal rights for Palestinians, the event began with speeches outside the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square before heading to Parliament Square via Oxford Street. A small, but vocal, counter-demonstration of pro-occupation Zionists also took place

There is more than a little irony in Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to attend a "celebration" dinner this month in London with his British counterpart, Theresa May, marking the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

Palestinian objections to the 1917 document are well-known. Britain's Lord Balfour had no right to promise a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, on the land of another people.

But Israelis have been taught a different history in which they, not the Palestinians, were betrayed. In 1939, Britain appeared to revoke its pledge, stating "unequivocally" that it would not establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Limits on Jewish immigration were imposed, at a time when Europe's Jews were fleeing the Nazi Holocaust. It was for this reason that nearly a quarter of a century ago, in his book *A Place Among the Nations*, Netanyahu accused Britain of perfidy.

One can understand the reluctance of Israelis today to concede the pivotal role provided by Britain. The Balfour Declaration is an embarrassing reminder that a Jewish state was the fruit of a transparently colonial project. In fact, Britain assisted the Zionists as best it could, given the need to weigh its imperial interests. Restrictions on immigration were introduced under the severe strain of a three-year armed uprising by Palestinians, determined to prevent their country being given away.

Historian Rashid Khalidi has noted that the Palestinian revolt of the late 1930s included possibly the longest-ever anti-colonial general strike. It posed such a threat that Britain committed thousands of extra soldiers to repress the insurgency, even as war loomed in Europe.

By the time Britain departed Palestine in 1948, it had overseen three decades in which the Zionists were allowed to develop the institutions of statehood: a government-in-waiting, the Jewish Agency; a proto-army in the Haganah; and a land and settlement



A CENTURY OF INJUSTICE: Demonstrators protest in London on the anniversary of the signing of the Balfour Declaration.

Balfour Betrayal



THIN YELLOW LINE: Police escort the protesters as they march from the US embassy to Parliament Square in London.

Palestinians in Israel were characterised as “the minorities,” or generic “Israeli Arabs,” rather than Palestinians

division known as the Jewish National Fund.

By contrast, any signs of Palestinian nationalism, let alone nation-building, were ruthlessly crushed. By the end of the Arab revolt, less than a decade before the Palestinians would face a campaign of ethnic cleansing by the Zionists, Palestinian society lay in ruins.

Israel learned two lessons from Britain that guided its subsequent struggle to quash Palestinian attempts at liberation.

First, it continued the draconian measures of British colonial rule. In the early 1950s, Menachem Begin, leader of the pre-state Irgun militia and a future Israeli prime minister, famously called Britain’s emergency regulations “Nazi laws.”

Nonetheless, they were incorporated into the military orders Israel uses against Palestinians under occupation. Signifi-

cantly, the regulations are also still in force inside Israel against the country’s large minority of Palestinian citizens, one in five of the population. Israel has yet to end its seven-decade state of emergency.

The other lesson derives from the wording of the Balfour Declaration. It referred to the native Palestinians – then 90 per cent of Palestine’s inhabitants – as “existing non-Jewish communities.” It promised only to protect their “civil and religious rights,” denying them recognition as a nation deserving of political and social rights.

Israel followed suit. Palestinians in Israel were characterised as “the minorities,” or generic “Israeli Arabs,” rather than Palestinians. Israel’s perverse nationality laws assign them largely religious classifications as Druze, Arameans (Christians) and Arabs (increasingly synonymous



RESISTING THE DEMONSTRATION: A small counter protest by pro-occupation Zionists unsuccessfully tried to disrupt the London march.

with Muslims).

In occupied East Jerusalem, Palestinians are denied all national and institutional representation. And in the West Bank, the powers of the Palestinian Authority – supposedly the Palestinians' fledgling government – extend no further than acting as a security contractor for Israel and carrying out municipal services such as garbage collection. In practice, the PA's severely circumscribed authority is confined to a tiny fraction of the West Bank. As a result, the Palestinians' national ambitions have shrunk precipitously: from Yasser Arafat's struggle for one secular democratic state in all Palestine, to today's enclaves in Gaza and slivers of the West Bank. Israel has consist-

ently rejected for Palestinians the very self-determination it once demanded from the British.

Netanyahu's government is preparing to nullify any lingering hopes of Palestinian statehood with the most significant move towards annexation of Palestinian territory in 40 years, when Jerusalem was annexed. The plan is to greatly expand Jerusalem's boundaries to include large Jewish settlements in the West Bank like Maale Adumim.

In addition, Netanyahu has reportedly promised \$230-m to build five highways in the West Bank, aiding movement between Israel and the settlements.

Is there an opposition? Avi Gabbay, new leader of the centre-left Zionist Un-

The powers of the Palestinian Authority – supposedly the Palestinians' fledgling government – extend no further than acting as a security contractor for Israel and carrying out municipal services such as garbage collection

Balfour Betrayal



CALLING FOR JUSTICE: Thousands of demonstrators take to the streets of London to demand an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine.



END THE CONFLICT: Protest flag demands the cessation of weapons sales.

ion, sounds no different from the far-right. Last month he stated: "I believe all of the Land of Israel [historic Palestine] is ours." No West Bank settlement would be evacuated, even for the sake of peace, he added. Britain fulfilled its promise to the Zionists in full, but broke even its feeble commitment to the Palestinians to protect their civil and religious rights.

An apology from Britain is long overdue, as are efforts to repair the damage it initiated 100 years ago. **CT**

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

● See more of Ron Fassbender's photographs from this event at www.flickr.com/photos/theweeklybull/albums/72157690210633986



CHURCHILL: Protester waves a banner and flag from the plinth of the giant statue of Winston Churchill in London's Parliament Square.

Creeping annexation

Ramzy Baroud tells why Israel shelved the 'Greater Jerusalem Law'

The political balances, and possible drawbacks, are just too delicate and great for Israel to get exactly what it wants

The postponing of an Israeli Knesset Bill that would have annexed major illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank to the Jerusalem municipality is the result of behind-the-scenes US and, possibly, European pressure. But the story of the so-called 'Greater Jerusalem law' does not end there.

Israel wants to maintain an absolute demographic Jewish majority in Jerusalem, including in occupied, and illegally annexed Palestinian East Jerusalem. There is enough support in the Knesset and among the public to ensure that coveted Jewish dominance. But the political balances, and possible drawbacks, are just too delicate and great for Israel to get exactly what it wants, even if there is a clear consensus among Israeli Jewish politicians and the public to permanently change the status of the city.

One of the factors that the Israeli government is considering is the support of the Donald Trump administration. How far will Trump go to support Israeli transgressions, while continuing to advocate an "ultimate deal" – his own version of finding a political resolution to the conflict resulting from Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine?

True, the Trump administration has done its utmost to reassure Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, of its undy-

ing loyalty. Trump's last visit to Israel was a major step in that direction, where US commitment to Israel's security and future were made abundantly and repeatedly clear. Moreover, the joint US-Israel push against the United Nations and its smaller institutions – such as UNESCO and UNHRC – led by US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, aims to torpedo future international initiatives that are critical of Israel's military occupation of Palestine.

Yet, on the other hand, using back channels and without much fanfare, Trump has been promoting his own plan for regional peace, marks of which are still unclear.

Altering the landscape

While Israel is routinely allowed to slowly alter the landscape of occupied Palestinian areas, construct walls and expand its illegal settlements, an explicit, major plan to annex large regions of the West Bank would have ignited the kind of backlash that could likely bring an end to Trump's Middle East politicking and complicate his relations with various Arab governments.

The "Greater Jerusalem law" would have done just that.

According to Israeli commentator, Shlomo Elder, the idea of expanding Jerusalem's municipal borders "to increase the city's population and to ensure its Jewish majority" was proposed by hardline Likud

party member, Yisrael Katz, in 2007. It was deferred then, due to the fear of a strong international reaction.

The idea did not die. It morphed into a movement and politicians from all ideological background joined in, fearing that, in the future, Israel will lose the ‘demographic war’ in Jerusalem, as well as in the rest of historic Palestine.

“Save Jewish Jerusalem” was launched in 2016 and quickly enlisted the support of politicians, academicians and other well-regarded Israelis, all united by their fear that they “would wake up with a Palestinian mayor in Jerusalem.”

So, when the “Greater Jerusalem law” was introduced earlier this year, it seemed like the logical evolution of a current that has been on the rise for years.

The bill proposed to expand the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem to include major illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank, including Ma’aleh Adumim and the Gush Etzion settlement cluster. Moreover, it endeavoured to bring 150,000 Jewish settlers into Jerusalem as eligible voters, who would have naturally tipped the political scene more to the right. Concurrently, the law would have further demoted the status of 100,000 Palestinians, who would find themselves in a political gray area.

The authors of the Bill were hardly discrete about its intentions. One of the two authors is Katz himself, who is now a minister in Netanyahu’s rightwing government. Explaining the motives behind the Bill, Katz blatantly said: The Bill aims to “ensure a Jewish majority in the united city.”

Israelis agree. According to a national poll published on November 3, 72 percent of Israeli Jews want Israel to maintain control over Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem; 68 percent want Jews to be able to pray in these holy sites; and 58 percent support Katz’s initiative to expand the Jerusalem municipal boundaries and merge major illegal Jewish settlements under one mu-



Benjamin Netanyahu: Different style.

Illustration: Donkeyholey, www.flickr.com/photos/donkeyholey

The bill proposed to expand the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem to include major illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank, including Ma’aleh Adumim and the Gush Etzion settlement cluster

nicipality.

While members of the Israeli government (and majority in the Knesset) work towards the same goal of expanding illegal settlements, ensuring Israel’s uncontested control over Jerusalem and thwarting Palestinian aspirations for an independent state, their political approaches are not always the same.

Paying lip service

Netanyahu’s style is different from Katz. While paying lip service to peace, Netanyahu has no intentions of allowing a Palestinian state to ever take shape, and is tactically working to ensure a complete physical partition between East Jerusalem and the West Bank, while, simultaneously linking major settlement blocs to Jerusalem.

One of such efforts includes the recent decision to destroy two Palestinian villages of Khan Al-Ahmar (located in the E-1 corridor which connects Jerusalem to Ma’aleh Adumim) and Susya. The ethnic cleansing plan was described by Israeli rights group, B’Tselem, as “virtually unprecedented.”

Taking Control

It was Netanyahu's office that postponed the Bill again, fearing to upset the special relationship he has managed to espouse under the Trump presidency

But Netanyahu had to temporarily flout his own method of "creeping annexation" of Palestinian land to join the burgeoning movement championed by Katz and others, who call for wholesale annexation and dramatic steps to ensure Jewish dominance.

By doing so, he was prepared to deal with another popular Palestinian revolt, similar to the one that culminated last July in protest of Israel's closure of al-Haram al-Sharif/al-Aqsa compound.

However, pressure emanating in Washington, which reportedly took place just as the Knesset's ministerial committee on legislation was preparing to approve the Bill on October 29, ended the Israeli manoeuvre for now.

It was Netanyahu's office that postponed the Bill again, fearing to upset the

special relationship he has managed to espouse under the Trump presidency.

So, at least for now, Israel will resume its 'creeping annexation' tactics, paying no heed to international protests, and oblivious to the injustice inflicted on Palestinians. But, of course, the battle in the Israeli Knesset is not over, and more aggressive efforts at driving Palestinians out, while slowly annexing their land, are likely to follow. **CT**

Ramzy Baroud has been writing about the Middle East for over 20 years. He is an internationally-syndicated columnist, a media consultant, an author of several books and the founder of PalestineChronicle.com. His latest book is My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story (Pluto Press, London). His website is: ramzybaroud.net

Bendib's World

Khalil Bendib



ColdType Insights

Paradise Papers, rock stars and the tax man

Adam Behr explains how financial revelations shed new light on the hostility between musicians and tax authorities

It's one for you, 19 for me" ran George Harrison's scabrous jibe at the "Taxman" in 1966, a bitter riposte to the 95 percent super-tax that Prime Minister Harold Wilson's Labour government had imposed on the very wealthy.

Although top rates of tax are now substantially lower across the developed world (under 50 percent in the UK and Australia), it's hardly surprising that the latest international tax avoidance scandal – the Paradise Papers – should feature rock stars in its cast.

The leaked papers reveal Michael Hutchence's estate tied up in offshore tax havens – to the possible exclusion of his surviving family. U2's Bono has also been found to have used a firm in Malta to pay for a share in a Lithuanian shopping mall.

While they're far from the only such cases, what distinguishes them in the public mind is the disjunction between public image and private affairs. These exposés throw into

sharp relief the inconsistencies in romanticising rock. Free-spirited creativity is seen working hand-in-glove with the "suits."

Sex and drugs and rock and roll, following Ian Dury's coinage, might seem like a natural fit. Corporate-style tax avoidance and rock and roll less so. Rock has long railed against "The Man" on stage, but the current cases reveal a well-established and more specific hostility between stars and the taxman.

The grubby, druggy aesthetic of the Rolling Stones' classic *Exile on Main Street*, recorded on the

French Riviera, belied the fact that the eponymous banishment was in fact the band fleeing a tax bill and liabilities as residents in the UK. Bill Wyman recalled: "We owed money to the Inland Revenue. There was no way could make enough money to get ourselves out of trouble, we'd be paying like 93 percent tax and there was no way we could earn enough to pay back what we owed."

This decision was informed by the band's business manager, Prince Rupert Loewenstein. His financial stewardship helped to turn them into a global brand, not least through careful choices of touring, rehearsal and recording locations to minimise tax bills. If these stratagems seem to cut across the "devil may care" rebellion or heartfelt sincerity of rock, they also reveal a paradox at its core as a mass-produced, commercial form of music that inherited an anti-establishment ideology from the folk movements of the 1940s and '50s.

With the Beatles' and Stones' upending of previous commercial and aesthetic norms aligned with a generational shift, it was, writes Professor Simon Frith, "easy enough for 1960s rock fans . . . to claim that even if their music was commercial, it nevertheless symbolised a community."

This tension between "art" and "commerce" is woven throughout popular music. The brightest stars



The Rolling Stones in Milwaukee. Photo: Jim Pietryga, via Wikimedia

Insights

of the musical firmament have battalions of lawyers, managers and accountants to conduct their affairs. The skills needed to negotiate the complexities of multimillion-dollar enterprises are, after all, rather different to those for recording and performing hits.

It's perhaps to be expected, as appears to have been the case with Hutchence, that some musicians have less-than-granular knowledge of how their often internecine concerns are set up. There's a long and ignominious history of musicians falling prey to their business associates.

Sting's financial adviser, for instance, lost £4.8-million on investments that included restaurants in Australia and plans to adapt Russian military planes into passenger liners. Billy Joel's former manager, likewise, lost millions on failed investments, and gave out loans of more than US\$2.5-million to real estate and horse breeding enterprises. All without their clients' knowledge.

Bono has been caught in this paradox. Keen to put distance between himself and the mechanics of U2's business interests when challenged in 2015, he said that they were "just some smart people we have... trying to be sensible about the way we're taxed." More recently, he expressed distress at the possibility that his investments have been "anything less



U2's Bono . . . "less than exemplar."

Photo: Peter Neill, via Wikimedia

than exemplar."

Given that such stars' appeal – and therefore partly their commercial success – resides in a sense of something beyond the sharp-edged logistics of the corporate world, it shouldn't be a shock that accusations of hypocrisy follow a whiff of chicanery around their business dealings.

Pop and rock, though, have been thoroughly tied up in the intricacies of international trade for decades, and the creative industries are increasingly important to governments' economic strategies.

The issue runs deeper than wealthy artists who make a play on their gritty roots, such as the Arctic Monkeys being propelled to fame via trenchant observations of Sheffield street life and then taken to task over a previous tranche of tax revelations, which also included George Michael and Katie

Melua. They were all found to have invested in a scheme called Liberty, recently shut down by the UK government. The scheme was set up offshore via a company created in the Cayman Islands, which they then used to avoid taxes on other income. The perception of authenticity at the heart of international stardom is rooted in the commonality that, at the end of the day, taxes exist to support. But sustaining it commercially involves traversing a web of jurisdictions.

If these contradictions have been built into rock from the outset, perhaps a sense of betrayal was inevitable. The current travails over superstar taxes are unlikely to be the last. Ultimately, it will take concerted action – and co-operative international government action at that – to make tax loads at the upper end of the economic ladder more than a matter of conscience.

This won't solve rock's art-commerce dichotomy but, to paraphrase the Stones shortly before their own fiscal entanglements, it might help to balance the other equation of people getting what they want against what they need. **CT**

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Adam Behr is a lecturer in popular and contemporary music at Newcastle University in England. This article was originally published at www.theconversation.com.

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City demands church stops feeding homeless

Charity for the homeless is now judged to be a crime in a growing number of US states, writes **Vic Bishop**

It's tough to say when our societal values shifted so dramatically, but for some reason now, government at large has decided that charity for the homeless is a crime. In a society with such stunning abundance, efforts to feed the homeless are being met with legal challenges and even police action in America. This is a disturbing trend which has been gaining steam in recent years.

In the latest publicised event, authorities in California have demanded that the United Methodist Church in Malibu, CA stop its meager yet hope-giving program of offering hot meals to the city's homeless. The church has been giving away only 100 meals a week, on Wednesdays, since 2014, which is a relatively small humanitarian contribution in a wave of homelessness which has descended on the West Coast since the housing crisis of 2008 and now spurred on by the excesses of the regions tech industry.

"It's a safe place," said Michah Johnson, who is homeless. "And everyone is welcome. And the food is really good. It's home-cooked. And there's TLC involved."

"The church is very helpful," he added. "They keep my spirits up. They keep me accountable. When you're homeless, it's very easy to slip off and become jaded." [Source]

This is nothing new, as we have seen for the last few years authorities have been cracking down on efforts by citizens around the nation who attempt to help the homeless by providing food for them. Without the help of churches, citizens and other devoted organizations, our homeless neighbours are left to scavenge for sustenance, as noted by a member of Malibu United Methodist Church.

"I think many of them eat out of dumpsters and trash cans when they aren't eating with us," said Kay Gabbard, who also works with the United Methodist Church. "We can't pretend like (homelessness) doesn't exist in our backyard. We can't pretend that it only exists out-

side Malibu." [Source]

When contacted by CBS Los Angeles for comment on this issue, the Mayor's office in Malibu did not respond with a comment, and as of now there is no clear reason why this policy is to go into effect. Nevertheless, given the track record in cases like these, cities claim that feeding homeless people puts others in danger and causes a public nuisance, which is a wholesale denial of the depth of the homeless problem.

In 2014 it was reported that some 33 US cities had enacted restrictions or outright bans on feeding the homeless, and this has only continued to increase in subsequent years. Charity workers in Florida and other cities have even been arrested for efforts to support the homeless in their communities. And a major crackdown on feeding homeless earlier this year in San Francisco made headlines. **CT**

Vic Bishop is a staff writer at www.WakingTimes.com - where this article was first published.

Forget the Nordic diet. Try their tax plan instead

Keith Payne says the best way to improve life expectancy isn't by following fad diets; it's to reduce inequality

You've heard, no doubt, of the miraculous Mediterranean diet, which is said to keep Italians and Greeks living healthy lives into their 80s and beyond. The

Japanese diet is popular, too, as the Japanese live the longest lives in the world.

Then there's the Nordic diet, full of fish and dairy, that helps make

Insights

longevity in Sweden and Norway among the longest in the world.

Countless studies have tried to identify the critical ingredients in these diets. Should we eat grilled squid like the Greeks? Or more lingonberries like the Swedes?

But the closer you look at the link between specific diets and health, the fuzzier the link becomes.

The French live some of the longest lives on earth. The oldest known person was Jeanne Calment, a French woman who lived to 122 (and a half). And yet the French diet has become known as “the French paradox,” because it’s suspiciously high in saturated fat.

Other countries, like Germany and Canada, have long lifespans, yet no one puts schnitzel and poutine on our list of health foods. What if the apparent link between a country’s diet and its health is an illusion?

One reason that people leap from longevity to diet is a mental quirk known as the “you are what you eat” fallacy. Psychologists have found that people assume that the properties of food are transferred to those who eat it. In some parts of Asia, for example, tiger penises are eaten to increase men’s virility.

But it’s not specific to Asia. American college students show a similar superstition.

In one study, students learned about the cultural practices of two tribes. One was said to eat wild boars, whereas the other ate turtles. When the students were asked to describe the members of each tribe, they said the boar eaters were bearded and aggressive, and the turtle eaters were good swimmers with long lifespans.

The leap from healthy lives to healthy-seeming foods might just be the same error.

Medical evidence suggests that differences in lifespans across countries are better explained by social conditions than diet. Researchers have found that among economically developed countries, income inequality is a major predictor of longevity.

In fact, the most equal nations are Japan, Sweden, and Norway, which also have the longest life spans. Not far behind are Mediterranean nations including Spain, Greece, and Italy.

It’s no coincidence that all these highly equal countries have inspired fad diets.

If social equality is really the active ingredient keeping people healthy in these countries, then other mysteries start to make sense. Germany and Canada have low inequality and accordingly, long lives. France is no longer a paradox: Their

low inequality explains their longevity. The Bordeaux might have nothing to do with it.

At the bottom of the longevity list are high-inequality counties like the United States. Despite being among the wealthiest countries on earth, American life expectancy lags behind those of poorer, but more equal, countries like Ireland and Greece.

The biggest health advances of the 20th century – antibiotics, sanitation, vaccines – were biological. The biggest public health insights of this century, in contrast, are social. Societies that allow extreme inequality to shred the social fabric pay the price in illness, unhappiness, and mortality. American life expectancy decreased last year for the first time in decades. The best way to reverse that decline isn’t diet plans, but economic policies that reduce inequality. Fresh fish and olive oil are nearly miraculous gifts. But if you want to live longer, my bet is on a living wage and affordable health care. **CT**

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*Keith Payne, PhD., is a professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of North Carolina and author of *The Broken Ladder: How Inequality Affects the Way We Think, Live, and Die*. This article first appeared at www.otherwords.org*

READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT
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Thank you, Ed Herman

Diana Johnstone pays tribute to the political activist and author

Edward S. Herman died on November 11, 2017, at the age of 92. Fortunately, it was a peaceful death for a supremely peaceful man. In all he did, Ed Herman was a tireless champion of peace.

Ed Herman could be considered the godfather of antiwar media critique, both because of his own contributions and because of the many writers he encouraged to pursue that work. Thanks to his logical mind and sense of justice, he sharply grasped the crucial role and diverse techniques of media propaganda in promoting war. He immediately saw through lies, including those so insidious that few dare challenge them, such as the arrogant presumption by the US War Party of the “right to protect” and the “need to prevent genocide,” to justify the oxymoronic “humanitarian war.”

He saw that these pro-war lies flourish on the basis of what he called the distinction between “worthy and unworthy victims” persistently drawn by apologists for United States militarism. The million of victims of United States bombings, sanctions, regime changes and undercover assassinations are not considered calls to arms. Washington think tanks do not draw moral conclusions concerning the victims of Dresden, Hiroshima and Vietnam. But the public is endlessly exhorted to indignation concerning victims whose misfortune can serve as *casus belli* for the latest US aggression.

Imperialist Party Line hypocrites predictably pretended not to understand this distinction, and deliberately misinterpreted Herman’s exposure of this propaganda device to falsely accuse him of “denial” – when all he was denying was the pretext for more war.

The date of Ed Herman’s death carries an irony that he might have appreciated. It was the 99th anniversary of the armistice that brought an end to the wholesale slaughter of World War, a date that should above all be a reminder that war is senseless mass murder. Europe sacrificed its future and a generation of its youth to a pointless struggle, because masses of people accepted

the propaganda that portrayed the other side as an evil threat. Yet today, the United States, by proclaiming that day to be Veterans Day, subtly turns it into a glorification of war, by requiring public honour for soldiers who died – worthy victims. The unworthy cause always hides behind the worthy victims.

Ed Herman was not only a courageous political commentator, of rigorous honesty, who constantly dared challenge official lies with careful and factual analysis. He was also an extraordinarily good man, outraged against injustice but always kind and gentle, generous and considerate.

He personified human qualities that currently appear to have gone out of style. Prominent among these qualities was modesty. He generously encouraged other writers, and greatly enjoyed working with others, notably Noam Chomsky, as co-author. He had no vanity. His most famous work, *Manufacturing Consent*, a more or less permanent worldwide best-seller, is widely attributed to Noam Chomsky – although Chomsky himself, in recognition of Herman’s leading role in developing the book’s ideas, insisted in putting Herman’s name ahead of his own in non-alphabetical order. It never seemed to occur to Ed Herman that he never had the recognition he deserved.

He had no children, and after she suffered a disabling accident, he cared for his wife Mary for the last years of her life before she died in August 2013, after 67 years of marriage. His pleasures were simple: he enjoyed a good meal and he loved cats, especially the strays who were lucky enough to find him. He never expected gratitude, but there are so many of us, human and feline, who have reason to say, thank you, Ed Herman, for all you gave us.

CT

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